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Robert Lowell

TWO POEMS

CALIGULA

My namesake, Little Boots, Caligula,
you disappoint me. Tell me what I saw
to make me like you when we met at school?
I took your name—poor odd-ball, poor spoiled fool,
my prince, young innocent and bowdlerized!
Your true face sneers at me, mean, thin, agonized,
the rusty Roman medal where I see
my lowest depths of possibility.

What can be salvaged from your life? A pain
that gently darkens over heart and brain,
a fairy's touch, a cobweb's weight of pain,
now makes me tremble at your right to live.
I live your last night. Sleepless fugitive,
your purple bedclothes and imperial eagle
grow so familiar they are home. Your regal
hand accepts my hand. You bend my wrist,
and tear the tendons with your strangler's twist . . .
You stare down hallways, mile on stoney mile,
where statues of the gods return your smile.
Why did you smash their heads and give them yours?
You hear your household panting on all fours,

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and itemize your features—sleep's old aide!
Item: your body hairy, badly made,
head hairless, smoother than your marble head;
item: eyes hollow, hollow temples, red
cheeks rough with rouge, legs spindly, hands that leave
a clammy snail's trail on your soggy sleeve . . .
a hand no hand will hold . . . nose thin, thin neck—
you wish the Romans had a single neck!

Small thing, where are you? Child, you sucked your thumb,
and could not sleep unless you hugged the numb
and wooly-witted toys of your small zoo.
There was some reason then to fondle you
before you found the death-mask for your play.
Lie very still, sleep with clasped hands, and pray
for nothing. Child! Think, even at the end,
good dreams were faithful. You betray no friend
now that no animal will share your bed.
Don't think! . . . And yet the God Adonis bled
and lay beside you, forcing you to strip.
You felt his gored thigh spurting on your hip.
Your mind burned, you were God, a thousand plans
ran zig-zag, zig-zag. You began to dance
for joy, and called your menials to arrange
deaths for the gods. You worshipped your great change,
took a cold bath, and rolled your genitals
until they shrank to marbles . . .

Animals
fattened for your arenas suffered less
than you in dying—yours the lawlessness
of something simple that has lost its law,
my namesake, and the last Caligula.

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THE MOUTH OF THE HUDSON

A single man stands like a bird-watcher,
and scuffles the pepper and salt snow
from a discarded, gray
Westinghouse Electric cable drum.
He cannot discover America by counting
the chains of condemned freight-trains
from thirty states. They jolt and jar
and junk in the siding below him.
He has trouble with his balance.
His eyes drop,
and he drifts with the wild ice
ticking seaward down the Hudson,
like the blank sides of a jig-saw puzzle.

The ice ticks seaward like a clock.
A negro toasts
wheat-seeds over the coke-fumes
in a punctured barrel.
Chemical air
sweeps in from New Jersey,
and smells of coffee.

Across the river,
ledges of suburban factories tan
in the sulphur-yellow sun
of the unforgivable landscape.

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Mary McCarthy

ON MADAME BOVARY

When Flaubert made his famous statement—"Madame Bovary is me"—he was echoing one of his favorite authors, Cervantes. According to the story, Cervantes was asked on his deathbed whom he meant to depict in Don Quixote. "Myself," he answered. In Cervantes's case, this must have been true, quite simply and terribly, whether or not he ever said it. In Flaubert's, the answer was an evasion. He was tired of being asked about the "real-life original" of his heroine. In fact, there *was* one; there may even have been two. First and most important was Delphine Delamare, née Couturier, the wife of a village doctor in the Bray region in Normandy, not far from where Flaubert lived. In 1848, she took poison, leaving behind her an unpaid bill from a circulating library in Rouen; the Delamares' furniture was sold at public auction to satisfy her creditors. Her case was in the newspapers, and Flaubert's friends had suggested it to him as the subject for a novel, on the writing-course principle of "Write about what you know." When *Madame Bovary* appeared in 1857, Dr. Delamare, like Charles Bovary, had died of grief, but the other principals were still living: Rodolphe, Léon, the servant Félicité. And many years later, in the village of Ry—the original of Yonville l'Abbaye—Delphine Delamare's smart double curtains, yellow and black, were still talked about by her neighbors. Today her house is gone, but her garden is there, the property of the village pharmacist, who displays in his shop what purports to be Monsieur Homais's counter. The real Monsieur Homais was probably legion. Flaubert is said to have spent a month while writing *Madame Bovary* in a hotel at Forges-les-Eaux studying the local pharmacist, a red-hot anticlericalist and diehard republican, whom he had already spotted and banded, but he is also said to have had his eye on other atheistical druggists, birds of the same feather, in the neighborhood.

In short, *Madame Bovary* revived a scandal that had been a nine-days' wonder in the locality, and Flaubert no doubt was sick of the gossip

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and somewhat remorseful, like most authors, for what he had started. At the same time, as an author, he must have resented the cheapening efforts of real life to claim for itself material he had transmuted with such pain in his study; even in her name "Delphine Delamare" sounds like a hack's alias for Emma Bovary. The gossip was not silenced by his denials. In 1905, Félicité, aged seventy-nine (her real name was Augustine), was still giving interviews about her mistress to literary critics. Even now the village of Ry is recognizable to readers of the novel; a small sign identifies the inn as the original of the Lion d'Or; Rodolphe's chateau is pointed out on a nearby road. Beyond the village, there are the meadows bordering the stream, poplar trees, and many cow-bridges made of old planks like the one Emma (or Delphine) used to cross going to meet her lover. After *Madame Bovary,* the figures in the Delamare story must have spent their lives as marked men. "Rodolphe," a veritable Cain, emigrated to America, then came back and killed himself on a Parisian boulevard, possibly from remorse. This cannot have been part of Flaubert's intention. And the gossip, as always, must have been wrong some of the time. What if the gentleman everyone insisted was Rodolphe had been only an innocent neighbor who could not stand the publicity?

The net has been cast wider. A second model for Emma has been found in the wife of Flaubert's friend, the sculptor Pradier, who made the pretty ladies, Lille and Strasbourg, that sit on pedestals like halted patriotic floats on the Place de la Concorde. A "memoir" of this woman, written out in an illiterate script by her confidante, a carpenter's wife, had fallen into Flaubert's hands. Did he use it? Louise Pradier was good-looking, silly, extremely unfaithful to her husband, and up to her neck in debt; she consoled herself by promises of suicide, though in fact it was her husband who died suddenly, like Charles Bovary, killed by the discovery of his wife's character and the bills she had run up. This does not prove that she "sat for" Flaubert, but Bohemian gossip may have said so; she may have thought so herself. Louise Pradier was living when *Madame Bovary* came out.

This endless conjecturing on the part of the public is the price paid by the realistic novelist for "writing about what he knows." With *Salammbô* and *The Temptation of St. Anthony,* there was no occasion for Flaubert to issue denials. But *Madame Bovary* was fraught with embarrassment for its author, and not only, it would seem, for the reasons already given. For example take the following. Dr. Delamare studied with Flaubert's father, the surgeon, in Rouen, and he was a poor student; these facts are established. Dr. Delamare, being dead, could not be hurt by the book. But there was someone else who could. Flaubert's

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brother, Achille, was a doctor. He did a bad operation on their father; gangrene developed, and Dr. Flaubert died. A little later, Flaubert's sister Caroline died of puerperal fever; it is not clear whether this was Achille again, but Flaubert in a letter described sitting up with Caroline's body while her husband and a priest snored. Just like Emma's wake. Flaubert remembered those snores. Did he remember the medical murder of his father when he wrote about Charles's operation on the club-footed inn boy—the most villainous folly in the book? A novelist is an elephant, but an elephant who must pretend to forget.

On the one hand, Flaubert declared *he* was Emma. On the other, he wrote to a lady: "There's nothing in *Madame Bovary* that's drawn from life. It's a *completely invented* story. None of my own feelings or experiences are in it." So help him God. Of course, he was fibbing, as is clear from his more intimate correspondence. Like all novelists, he drew on his own experiences, and, more than most novelists, he was frightened by the need to invent. When he came to do the ball at Vaubyessard, he lamented. "It's so long since I've been to a ball." If memory failed, he documented himself, as he did for Emma's school reading, going back over the children's stories he had read as a little boy and the picture books he had colored. If he had not an experience the story required, he sought it out. Before writing the chapter about the agricultural fair, he went to one; he consulted his brother about club foot and, disappointed by the ignorance of Achille's answers, procured textbooks. There is hardly a page in the novel that he had not "lived," and he constantly drew on his own feelings to render Emma's.

All novelists do this, but Flaubert went beyond the usual call of duty. Madame Bovary was not Flaubert, certainly; yet he became Madame Bovary and all the accessories to her story, her lovers, her husband, her little greyhound, the corset lace that hissed around her hips like a slithery grass snake as she undressed in the hotel room in Rouen, the blinds of the cab that hid her and Léon as they made love. In a letter he made clear the state of mind in which he wrote. That day he had been doing the scene of the horseback ride, when Rodolphe seduces Emma in the woods. "What a delicious thing writing is—not to be you any more but to move through the whole universe you're talking about. Take me today, for instance: I was man and woman, lover and mistress; I went riding in a forest on a fall afternoon beneath the yellow leaves, and I was the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words he and she spoke, and the red sun beating on their half-closed eyelids, which were already heavy with passion." It is hard to imagine another great novelist—Stendhal, Tolstoy, Jane Austen, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Balzac—

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who would conceive of the act of writing as a rapturous loss of identity. Poets have often expressed the wish for otherness, for fusion—to be their mistress' sparrow or her girdle or the breeze that caressed her temples and wantoned with her ribbons, but Flaubert was the first to realize this wish in prose, in the disguise of a realistic story. The climax of the horseback ride was, of course, a coupling, in which all of Nature joined in a gigantic throbbing *partouze* while Flaubert's pen flew. He was writing a book, and yet from his account you would think he was *reading* one. "What a delicious thing reading is—not to be you any more but to flow through the whole universe you're reading about . . ." etc., etc.

Compare this, in fact, to the rapt exchange of platitudes between Léon and Emma on the night of their first meeting, at dinner at the Lion d'Or. " '. . . is there anything better, really, than sitting by the fire with a book while the wind beats on your window panes and the lamp is burning?' 'Isn't it so?' she said, fixing him with her large black eyes wide open. 'One forgets everything,' he continued. 'The hours go by. Without leaving your chair you stroll through imagined landscapes as if they were real, and your thoughts interweave with the story, lingering over details or leaping ahead with the plot. Your imagination confuses itself with the characters, and it seems as if it were your own heart beating inside their clothes.' 'How true! How true!' she said."

The threadbare magic carpet, evidently, is shared by author and reader, who are both escaping from the mean provincial life close at hand. Yet *Madame Bovary* is one of a series of novels—including *Don Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*—that illustrate the evil effects of reading. *All* reading, in the case of *Madame Bovary,* not simply the reading of romances. The books Emma fed on were not all trash, by any means; in the convent she had read Chateaubriand; as a girl on the farm, she read *Paul et Virginie*. The best-sellers she liked were of varying quality: Eugène Sue, Balzac, George Sand, and Walter Scott. She tried to improve her mind with history and philosophy, starting one "deep" book after another and leaving them all unfinished. Reading was undermining her health, according to her mother-in-law, who thought the thing to do was to stop her subscription to the lending library in Rouen. It ought to be against the law, declared the old lady, for circulating libraries to supply people with novels and books against religion, that mock at priests in speeches taken from Voltaire. Flaubert is making fun of Madame Bovary, Senior, and yet he too felt that Emma's reading was unhealthy. And for the kind of reason her mother-in-law would give: books put ideas in Emma's head. It is characteristic of Flaubert that his own no-

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tions, in the mouths of his characters, are turned into desolate echoes—into clichés.

Léon too is addicted to books, as the passage cited shows. *He* prefers poetry. But it is not only the young people in *Madame Bovary* who are glamorized by the printed page. Monsieur Homais is another illustration of the evil effects of reading. He offers Emma the use of his library, which contains, as he says, "the best authors, Voltaire, Rousseau, Delille, Walter Scott, the *Echo des Feuilletons.*" These authors have addled his head with ideas. And Monsieur Homais's ideas are dangerous, literally so; not just in the sense that Madame Bovary, Senior, meant. An idea invading Monsieur Homais's brain is responsible for Charles's operation on the deformed Hippolyte. Monsieur Homais had read an article on a new method for curing club foot, and he was immediately eager that Charles should try it; in his druggist mind there was a typical confusion between humanitarian motives and a Chamber of Commerce zeal. The operation is guaranteed to put Yonville l'Abbaye on the map. He will write it up himself for a Rouen paper. As he tells Charles, "an article in the paper gets around. People talk about it. It ends by snowballing." This snowballing is precisely what is happening, with horrible consequences yet to come. Thanks to an article in the press, Hippolyte will lose his leg.

The diffusion of ideas in the innocent countryside is the plot of *Madame Bovary.* When the book ran serially, Flaubert's editors, who were extremely stupid, wanted to cut the club foot episode: it was unpleasant, they said, and contributed nothing to the story. Flaubert insisted; he regarded it as essential to the book. As it is. This is the point where Monsieur Homais interlocks with Emma and her story; elsewhere he only talks and appears busy. True, Emma gets the arsenic from his "Capernaum"—a ridiculous name for his inner sanctum based on the transubstantiation controversy—but this is not really the druggist's fault. He is only an accessory. But when it comes to the operation Monsieur Homais is the creative genius; it is his hideous brain child, and Charles is his instrument. Up to the time of the operation, Monsieur Homais could appear as mere comic relief or prosaic contrast. But with the operation the affinity between apparent opposites—the romantic dreamer and the "man of science"—becomes clear. Monsieur Homais is not just Emma's foil; he is her alter ego.

For the first time, they see eye to eye; they are a team pulling together for Charles to do the operation and for the same reason: a thirst for fame. And both, in their infatuation with a dream, have lost sight of the reality in front of them, which is Charles. He surrenders to the

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dazzling temptation they hold out to him. What is it, exactly? The temptation to be something other than what he is, a slow, cautious, uncertain practitioner who is terrified to set a simple fracture. Charles has got nothing out of books; he cannot even stay awake after dinner to peruse a medical text. He accepts his ignorance innocently as his lot in life and takes precautions to do as little harm as possible; his pathos as a doctor is that he is aware of being a potential danger to his patients. Yet when Hippolyte's club foot is offered him, he falls, like Adam, urged on by the woman and the serpent. After the operation, Charles's limitations are made public, and the touching hope he had, of securing Emma's love by being different from what he is, is lost to both of them. This is the turning point of the book. Emma has met resistance in Charles, the resistance of inert reality to her desire to make it over, as she can change the paper in her parlor. In furious disgust she resumes her relations with Rodolphe, and from then on her extravagances have an hysterical set aim—revenge on Charles for his incompetence.

Both Emma and Monsieur Homais regard themselves as confined to a sphere too small for their endowments—hers in sensibility, his in sense. Emma takes flight into the country, where the chateau is, into the town; Monsieur Homais's solution is to inflate the village he lives in by his own self-importance and by judicious publicity. It must be remembered that if Emma is a reader, Monsieur Homais is not only a reader but a *writer*—the local correspondent of the *Fanal de Rouen*. That is, they represent the passive and active sides of the same vice. No local event has *happened* for Monsieur Homais till he has cast it into an epic fiction to be sent off to his paper; for Emma, less inventive, nothing happens in Yonville l'Abbaye by definition.

Emma surely felt that she had nothing in common with the grotesque pock-marked druggist in his velvet cap with the gold tassel; he was the antithesis of refinement. But Monsieur Homais was attracted to her and sensed a kindred spirit. He expressed this in his own way: "She's a woman of great parts who wouldn't be out of place in a sub-prefecture." Homais is a textbook case of the Art of Sinking in prose, and this is the comic side of his hobbled ambitions; he would like to be a modern Hippocrates, but he is a druggist—halfway between a cook and a doctor. He is bursting with recipes; he has a recipe for everything. At the same time, he would like to turn his laboratory, which is a kind of kitchen, into a consulting room; he has been in trouble with the authorities for playing doctor—practicing medicine without a license.

Emma's voluptuous dreams in coarser form have tickled the druggist's thoughts. He takes a fatherly interest in Léon, his lodger, seeing

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the notary's clerk as a younger self and imagining on his behalf a wild student life in Paris, with actresses, masked balls, champagne, and possibly a love affair with a great lady of the Faubourg St. Germain. He is dreaming à la Emma, but aloud, and he lends his dream, as it were, with a show of philanthropy to Léon. This is double vicariousness. In practice, Monsieur Homais's dissipations are more thrifty. When he goes to Rouen for an outing, he insists that Léon accompany him to visit a certain Bridoux, an apothecary who has a remarkable dog that goes into convulsions at the sight of a snuffbox. The unwilling clerk is seduced by Monsieur Homais's excitement into witnessing this performance, which seems to be the pharmacist's equivalent for a visit to a house of ill fame; and Léon knows he is committing an infidelity to Emma, who is waiting impatiently in "their" hotel room for him. In fact, between Emma and Homais, there has always been a subtle rivalry for Léon, and this betrayal is the first sign that she is losing. Léon is turning into a bourgeois; soon he will give up the flute and poetry, get a promotion, and settle down. As Léon is swallowed by the middle class, Monsieur Homais emerges. By the end of the novel, he has published a book, taken up smoking, like an artist, and bought two Pompadour statuettes for his drawing-room.

Bridoux's dog is an evil portent for Emma; he has been heard before, offstage, at another critical juncture, when Emma falls ill of brain fever, having received the "fatal" note from Rodolphe in a basket of apricots. Homais, to whom love is unknown, blames the smell of the apricots and is reminded of Bridoux's dog, another allergic subject. For Yonville l'Abbaye grief and loss only release a spate of anecdotes; similar instances are recalled, to reduce whatever has happened to its lowest common denominator. This occurs on the very first night the Bovarys arrive in Yonville; Emma's little greyhound has jumped out of the coach coming from Tostes and Lheureux, the draper, her nemesis-to-be, tries to console her with examples of lost and strayed dogs who found their masters after a lapse of years. Why, he had heard of one that came all the way back from Constantinople to Paris. And another that did fifty leagues as the crow flies and swam four rivers. And his own father had a poodle that jumped up on him one night on the street, after twelve years' absence. These wondrous animals, almost human, you might say, are a yipping chorus of welcome to Yonville l'Abbaye, where everything has a parallel that befell someone's cousin, and there is nothing new under the sun.

Emma's boredom and her recklessness distinguish her from Monsieur Homais, who is a coward and who creates boredom around him

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without suffering it himself. Yet Emma is tiresome too, at least to her lovers, and she would have been tiresome to Flaubert in real life, as he well knew, because her boredom is a silly copy of his own, and she is never more conventional and tedious than when she is decrying convention. She and Léon agree that membership in a circulating library is a necessity if you have to live in the provinces (he also has a music subscription), and they are both wholly dependent on this typical bourgeois institution. The lending library is a central metaphor of *Madame Bovary* because it is the inexhaustible source of *idées reçues*—borrowed ideas and stock sentiments which circulate tritely among the population.

But for Flaubert all ideas become trite as soon as somebody expresses them. This applies indifferently to good ideas and bad. He makes no distinction. For him, the lending library is an image of civilization itself. Ideas and feelings as well get more and more soiled and grubby, like library books, as they pass from hand to hand. The curé's greasy thumbprint on Christian doctrine is just as repulsive as Monsieur Homais's coffee stain on the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The pursuit of originality is as pathetic as Emma's decorating efforts. Similarly with the quality called sincerity. If it exists, it is inarticulate, pre-verbal, dumb as an ox or as the old peasant woman who is awarded a medal at the agricultural fair for fifty years of meritorious service. The speech of presentation annihilates fifty years of merit—a life—in a flash by turning it into *words*.

From his own point of view, this renders Flaubert's efforts in his study as unavailing as Emma's quest for a love that will live up to her solitary dreams. Words, like lovers, have the power of lying, and they also, like lovers, have a habit of repeating themselves, since language is finite. Flaubert's horror of repetition in writing (which has been converted into the dogma that you must never use the same word, above all the same adjective, twice on a page) reflects his horror of repetition in life. Involuntary repetition is banality. What remains doubtful, though, is whether banality is a property of life or a property of language or both. In Emma's eyes, it is life that is impoverished and reality that is banal, reality being symbolized for her by Charles. But Charles is not banal; Rodolphe and Léon are banal, and it is exactly their banality that attracts her.

Rodolphe is superior to Léon, in that his triteness is a calculation. An accomplished comedian, he is not disturbed, at the agricultural fair, by the drone of the voice awarding money prizes for animal flesh, manure, and flax, while he pours his passionate platitudes into Emma's fluttered ears. "Tell me, why have we known each other, we two? What chance

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has willed it?" His view of Emma is the same as the judge's view of a merino ram. She is flesh, with all its frailties, and he is an expert in flesh. Yet Rodolphe is trite beyond his intention. He is wedded to a stock idea of himself as a sensual brute that prevents him from noticing that he actually cares for Emma. His recipes for seduction, like the pomade he uses on his hair, might have been made for him by a pharmacist's formula, and the fact that they work provides him with a ready-made disillusionment. Since he knows that "eternal love" is a cliché, he is prepared to break with Emma as a matter of course and he drops a manufactured tear on his letter of adieu, annoyed by a vague sensation that he does not recognize as grief. As for Léon, he is too cowardly to let himself see that his fine sentiments are platitudes; he deceives himself in the opposite way from Rodolphe: Rodolphe feels something and convinces himself that it is nothing, while Léon feels nothing and dares not know it. Even his sensuality is timid and short-lived; his clerkly nature passively takes Emma's dictation.

Emma does not see the difference. She is disappointed in both her lovers and in "love" itself. Her principal emotions are jealousy and possessiveness, which represent the strong, almost angry movement of her will. In other words, she is a very ordinary middle-class woman, with banal expectations of life and an urge to dominate her surroundings. Her character is only remarkable for an unusual deficiency of natural feeling. Emma is trite; what happens to her is trite. Her story does not hold a single surprise for the reader, who can say at every stage, "I felt it coming." Her end is inevitable, but not as a classic doom, which is perceived as inexorable only when it is complete. It is inevitable because it is ordinary. *Anyone* could have prophesied what would become of Emma—her mother-in-law, for instance. It did not need a Tiresias. If you compare her story with that of Anna Karenina, you are aware of the pathos of Emma's. Anna is never pathetic; she is tragic, and what happens to her, up to the very end, is always surprising, for real passions and moral strivings are at work, which have the power of "making it new." In this her story is distinct from an ordinary society scandal of the period. Nor could any ordinary society prophet have forecast Anna's fate. "He will get tired of her and leave her," they would have said, of Vronsky. He did not. But Rodolphe could have been counted on to drop Emma, and Léon to grow frightened of her and bored.

Where destiny is no more than average probability, it appears inescapable in a peculiarly depressing way. This is because any element in it can be replaced by a substitute without changing the outcome; e.g.,

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if Rodolphe had not materialized, Emma would have found someone else. But if Anna had not met Vronsky on the train, she would still be married to Karenin. Vronsky is *necessary*, while Rodolphe and Léon are interchangeable parts in a machine that is engaged in mass production of human fates. *Madame Bovary* is often called the first modern novel, and this is true, not because of any technical innovations Flaubert made but because it is the first novel to deal with what is now called mass culture. Emma did not have television, and Félicité did not read comic books in the kitchen, but the phenomenon was rampant in every Yonville l'Abbaye, and Flaubert was the first to note it.

Mass culture in *Madame Bovary* means the circulating library and the *Fanal de Rouen* and the cactus plants Léon and Emma tend at opposite windows, having read about them in a novel that has made cactuses all the rage. It means poor Charles's phrenological head—a thoughtful attention paid him by Léon—and the pious reading matter the curé gives Emma as a substitute for "bad" books. It means the neoclassic town hall, with its peristyle, and the tax collector at his lathe, an early form of Do-it-yourself. One of the last visions Emma has of the world she is leaving is the tax collector in his garret pursuing his senseless hobby, turning out little wooden imitations of ivory curios, themselves no doubt produced in series in the Orient for export. She has run to Binet's attic from the notary's dining-room, which has simulated-oak wallpaper, stained-glass insets in the windows, a huge cactus, a "niche," and reproductions of Steuben's "Esmeralda" and Schopin's "Potiphar." Alas, it is like Emma to stop, in her last hours of life, to *envy* the notary. "That's the dining-room *I* ought to have," she says to herself. To her, this horrible room is the height of good taste, but the blunder does not just prove she has *bad* taste. If the notary had had reproductions of the "Sistine Madonna" and the "Mona Lisa," she would have been smitten with envy too. And she would have been right not to distinguish, for in the notary's interior any reproduction would have the same value, that of a trophy, like a stuffed stag's head. This is the achievement of mass-produced culture.

In Emma's day, mass-produced culture had not yet reached the masses; it was still a bourgeois affair and mixed up, ironically, with a notion of taste and discrimination—a notion that persists in advertising. Rodolphe in his chateau would be a perfect photographic model for whisky or tobacco. Emma's "tragedy" from her own point of view is her lack of purchasing power, and a critic might say that the notary's dining-room simply spelled out the word, *money*, to her. Yet it is not as simple as that; if it were, Emma's head would be set straighter on her shoulders.

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What has happened to her and her spiritual sisters is that simulated-oak wallpaper, say, has become itself a kind of money inexpressible in terms of its actual cost. Worse, ideas and sentiments, like wallpaper, have become a kind of money too and they share with money the quality of abstractness, which allows them to be exchanged. It is their use as coins that has made them trite—worn and rubbed—and at the same time indistinguishable from each other except in terms of currency fluctuation. The banalities exchanged between Léon and Emma at their first meeting ("And what music do you prefer?" "Oh, German music, which makes you dream") are simply coins; money in the usual sense is not at issue here, since both these young people are poor; they are alluding, through those coins, to their inner riches.

The same with Rodolphe and Emma; the same with nearly the whole cast of characters. A meeting between strangers in *Madame Bovary* inevitably produces a golden shower of platitudes. This shower of platitudes is as mechanical as the droning action of the tax collector's lathe. It appears to be beyond human control; no one is responsible and no one can stop it. There is a terrible scene in the middle of the novel where Emma appeals to God, in the person of the curé, to put an end to the repetitive meaninglessness of her life. God is preoccupied and inattentive, and as she moves away from the church, she hears the village boys reciting their catechism. "What is a Christian?" "He who being baptized . . . baptized . . . baptized. . . ." The answer is lost in an echo that reverberates emptily through the village. Yet the question, although intoned by rote, is a genuine one—the fundamental question of the book—for a Christian means simply a soul here. It is Emma's demand—"Who am I?"—coming back at her in ontological form, and there is no reply.

If this were all, *Madame Bovary* would be a nihilistic satire or howl of despair emanating from the novelist's study. But there *is* a sort of tongue-tied answer. That is Charles Bovary. Without Charles, Emma would be the moral void that her fatuous conversation and actions disclose. Charles, in a novelistic sense, is her redeemer. To her husband, she is sacred, and this profound and simple emotion is contagious.

He is stupid, a peasant, as she calls him, almost a devoted animal, clumsy, a dupe. His broad back looks to her like a platitude. He has small eyes; he snores. Until she reformed him, he used to wear a nightcap. Weeping beneath the phrenological head, he is nearly ridiculous. He is nearly ridiculous at the opera, when he complains that the music is keeping him from hearing the words. "I like to know where I am," he explains, though he, of all people, does not know where he is, in the

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worldly way of knowing what is going on under his nose. His next blunder, at the opera, is to spill a glass of orgeat down the back of a cotton spinner's wife. He has no imagination, Emma thinks, no "soul." When they find the green silk cigar case that must belong to the vicomte, on the way home from the ball at Vaubyessard, Charles's only reaction is to note that it contains two smokable cigars.

Yet this provincial, this philistine is the only real romantic in the novel—he and the boy Justin, Monsieur Homais's downtrodden apprentice, who dreams over Emma's fichus and underdrawers while Félicité irons in the kitchen. These two, the man and the boy, despised and rejected, are capable of "eternal love." Justin lets Emma have her death (the arsenic) because he cannot refuse her, just as Charles lets her have her every desire. The boy's passion drives him to books, instead of the other way around: Monsieur Homais catches him reading a book on "Married Love," with illustrations. Justin is only a child and he weeps like a child on Emma's grave. Charles is a man, a provider, and he has a true man's solicitude for the weaker creature. He sheds tears when he sees Emma eat her first bread and jam after her brain fever. This heavy, maladroit man is a person of the utmost delicacy of feeling. If he is easy to deceive, it is because his mind is pure. It never enters his head that Emma can be anything but good.

He first meets her in the kitchen of her father's farmhouse. He has been waked up at night to go set Farmer Rouault's leg, in a scene reminiscent of a genre painting: "Fetching the Doctor." A succession of genre scenes follows that evoke the Dutch masters of light—Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch: Emma making the bandage, pricking her fingers with the needle and putting them into her mouth to suck while the doctor watches; Emma in the kitchen sewing a white stocking, darting her tongue into a liqueur glass of curaçao; Emma in the farmyard under a silk parasol. Charles's senses are heated as she cools her cheek against her palm and her palm against the great andirons, and his mind is buzzing, like the flies crawling up the empty cider glasses, as he looks at her bare shoulders with little drops of sweat on them. He is a man, and she is a young lady; his bewilderment and bewitchment arise from this fusion of the sensual and the sacred. For him, marriage with Emma is a sacrament, and the reader never sees him in the act of love with her, as though Charles, ever tactful, reverently drew the bed curtains.

Why did she marry him? Flaubert does not really say. "To get away from the farm" is not enough. Would she have married Monsieur Homais if he had come courting? There are a number of questions about Emma's inner life that Flaubert does not ask. But thanks to

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Charles, the answer does not matter, because to him the whole thing is a mystery, and like the mysteries of faith to be accepted with holy joy and not puzzled over. For Charles, Emma is a mystery from start to finish. The fact that she ministers to his comfort, prepares charming little dishes, takes care of his house and his patients' accounts, is a part of the ineffable mystery of her sharing his bed. The reader is persuaded by Charles's unquestioning faith, to the point where Emma's little gewgaws—her watch charms, her monocle, her ivory workbox, the blue glass vases on her mantlepiece, her silver-gilt thimble—partake of her seductiveness. More than that, these acquisitions, seen through Charles's vision, do just what an advertiser would promise: they give Emma *value*. Thus Charles is not only Emma's dupe but the dupe of commerce. And yet it works; the reader is convinced that Emma is somehow *better* than, say, Madame Homais—which is not true.

Through Charles, Emma acquires poetry. But he could not possibly put into words what she means to him, and if he could have articulated a thought on the subject, would have declared that *she* had brought poetry into his life. This is so. There was no poetry with his first wife, the widow. Emma's beauty, of course, is a fact of her nature, and Charles has responded to it with worship, which is what beauty—a mystery—deserves. This explains why Charles, though quite deceived by Emma's character, is not a fool; he has recognized something in her about which he *cannot* be deceived.

Charles, like Farmer Rouault, is dumbly rooted in the organic world, where things speak in a simple sign language. A turkey says "Thank you" every year for a cure, like a votive offering, and two horses in the stable say that business is doing well. Flaubert is not sentimental about the peasantry, yet he prefers Nature and those who live with her and come to resemble her—as old couples come to resemble each other—to the commercial people of the town and the vulgar aristocrats of the chateaus, toward whose condition the tradespeople are aspiring. The peasants still have the virtue of concreteness, and their association with the soil and its products guarantees that they are largely, so to speak, home-made. Emma brings her freshness from the cider-presses of the farm, which she hates.

The country people in general are at a kind of halfway stage in the process of evolution from the animal kingdom to Monsieur Homais. The farm men who come to Emma's wedding are seen by the author as collections of strange, out-of-date clothes hung on frames of flesh and bones—tailcoats and shooting jackets and cutaways and stiff shirts that have been kept in the wardrobe all year round and issue forth only to go to weddings and funerals, as if by themselves. These grotesque ani-

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mated garments, each with a strong personality, have as absurd a relation to their owners as the queer cap Charles wears on his first day at school. The new cap, which is like a recapitulation of the history of headgear, is an uncomfortable ill-fitting false self donned for a special occasion—Charles's introduction to civilization, learning, book culture. The country boy does not know what to do with the terrible cap, any more than how to give his full name, which he pronounces in a queer way, as though it too were extraneous to him, a humiliation that has been stuck to him and that he cannot get rid of, just as he cannot put the cap down. A name is a label. Witness the penmanship flourishes of Monsieur Homais's names for his children: Franklin, Athalie, etc. . . .

Many novels begin with the hero's first day in school, and Charles is the hero of the book that, characteristically for him, bears someone else's name. *Madame Bovary* starts with his appearance among his jeering school-fellows and ends with his death. Charles is docile. It does not occur to him to rebel. His mother, his teachers, his schoolmates, and finally the widow, make a citizen of him. They equip him with a profession, for which he is totally unfitted but which he wears, like the cap he has been given, mildly and without protest. He did not choose to be a doctor; he did not choose his name; he did not choose the widow. The only thing in life he chooses is Emma. She is his first and last piece of self-expression. Or not quite the last. When she is taken away from him, his reverence and gratitude to the universe turn to blasphemy. "I hate your God!" he bursts out to the curé, who is trying to console him with platitudes. "Still the spirit of rebellion," the priest answers, with an ecclesiastical sigh.

Now at first glance this appears to be an irony, since Charles has never rebelled until that moment against anything, let alone God. But Flaubert's ironies are deceptive, and what sounds like an irony is often the simple truth, making a double irony. The priest is right. From the very beginning, Charles has been an obstinate example of passive resistance to the forces of the time and the milieu. A proof of this is that, in all his days, he pronounces only one platitude. His love for Emma is the deepest sign of that obstination. He loves her in the teeth of circumstance, opinion, prudent self-interest, in the teeth even of Emma herself.

This passive resistance of Charles's, taking the form of a love of beauty, seems to come from nowhere. There is nothing in Charles's history to explain it: a drunken father, a dissatisfied mother, a poor education, broken off for lack of money. Add to this a very middling I.Q. No program for human improvement could be predicated on Charles's

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mute revolt against organized society. He is a sheer accident, nothing less than a placid miracle occurring among the notaries and tradesmen, the dyers and spinners of the textile city of Rouen, where he hankers, unobtrusive, uncomplaining, for his country home, which was no arcadia either. He is a revelation, and at the same time his whole effort is to escape detection, to hide in his fleshly envelope like some hibernating animal. Moreover, his goodness (for that is what it amounts to) has no practical utility and will leave no trace behind it. As a husband, he is a social handicap to Emma, and his mild deference probably contributes to her downfall; a harsher man might have curbed her extravagances, so that she would not have been obliged to commit suicide. After his death, his little girl is sent to work as a child laborer in a cotton mill; he has not even been able to protect his young. His predecessor, the Polish exile (another romantic?), at least left behind him *in situ* the bower he made to drink beer in on summer evenings, but the only reminder of himself Charles leaves in Yonville l'Abbaye is Hippolyte's stump and two artificial legs, one for best—bought by Emma—and one for everyday. Was he drawn from life? Or did Flaubert make him up, as a consolation to himself? All that can be said is that Charles Bovary is a possibility that cannot be ruled out even from a pessimistic view of the march of events.

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Sarah Plimpton

DAY OF THE WEDDING

Robins' voices call incessantly, ricocheting loudly off the house, interrupted only when they fly scolding to another perch, their call then echoing in a different manner. The window bangs in the wind which whips the curtains straight out into the room and the plastic tips on the strings for the venetian blinds hit against the wall in an insistent tap tap; a low rumble of thunder rises behind the robins' cries quenching them for a few seconds and drops of rain fall onto the glass. I get up and look out at the dark clouds bulging above the trees. The boughs sway drunkenly; the leaves pulling at their stems, their white bellies reflecting the glare before the storm.

The lights dim continually during breakfast, nobody says anything, the coffee is strong, burning away cells on its way down. An artery beats on one side of the head, pulsing between skin and bone and I eat one piece of toast after another dissolving raspberry jam into the hot butter. An enormous bang of thunder, a simultaneous illumination of the room, bright white, causing us to look up at each other in a surprised fashion, finishes the lights. I get some candles to brighten the morning darkness, pausing to stare out across the meadow at the rain which is approaching in curtains swept by the wind horizontally. John goes upstairs to close the windows. I find a yellow slicker in a closet and walk through the kitchen smiling at the large cook who is sticking one clove after another into a ham, humming, and then cross the yard to my car. I get the Sunday paper out of the store just before the rain hits and drive back to the house along the sea watching the breakers crash against the breakwater and a flock of herons flying upwind over the marshes

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just missing the tips of the long marsh grass, rising higher in the strong gusts. The lawn tennis courts are deserted, the nets removed, the brown earth at the service lines showing clearly in the wet. Two ducks come in for shelter near a small dock where an old green rowboat pulls at its mooring rope in the wind, tilting one way and then another. My windshield wipers begin to squeak, and the leak in the window rubber drips. The driveway is filled with puddles, the drains clogged, the great drops churning saucer shaped depressions. I can see the candles flickering inside and Mary waves as I drive past the windows to the garage. I trail through the house leaving wet leaves and cut grass on the floors and rugs.

We spread the papers on the rug, crouching over the dim print and I read everything and remember nothing; movie reviews, book reviews, the week's news floats up off the page, sits suspended flatly in front of my eyes and then drifts away horizontally. I put on a record, the music spreads through the white room with its low sofas and long-haired rugs and takes its shape, a square of white walls and a glass window streaming with water. Mary gets up catching her high heels in the long strands of the rug and opens the door. The music loses its form and flows out into the next room.

"It's a bad day for a wedding."

"Yes."

We concentrate again, shuffling papers and drinking the coffee that the cook brings on a tray. Water continues to be everywhere, the thunder sounds distantly, lagging after the flashes of light I see behind the line of trees through the window. They leave to do other things and I stretch out on the sofa arranging the rough textured pillows under my head and stare up at the lights that hang on long cords throughout the room, examine the cracks in the ceiling and then just stare out the big window at the trees undulating and struggling out of their tight elastic bathing suits as the water courses down the glass.

It is a bad day for a wedding, particularly this wedding. Weddings should be in the sun and warmth. Large flowery garden party hats should drift here and there among the banks of colors, humors flowing lightly and expansively. Broadly smiling faces should stroll among the hedges and little girls wearing dresses with stiff white

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skirts that stick out and patent leather shoes should run after little boys, with hot cheeks and words tumbling out.

"Weren't they a pretty pair."

"I did love her dress."

"It's such a perfect day for a wedding, and the flowers."

"The flowers were nice."

"They are a good pair don't you think?"

An abstract wedding would have merged into all the others and disappeared into fine spring weather lost in the light blue haze of the morning sun that rises from the unfreezing fields, hidden among the other newly opened flowers and in the mass of color of the white fruit trees touched with pink. It would have flowered out in its section of the garden, been cut by the gardener for the house, clipped and arranged in the latest manner to be put in the best room to match a chair and to brighten a particular corner where shadows tend to fall too early in the afternoon. There it would have only lasted a short time and a maid would finally have been to carry it away. Or it might never have been cut and it would have stayed on the stem and wilted there among all the others to be trampled on the ground as it faded and fell; a short duration of color and form. This day stinks of wet and the bog, of the generated gas that bubbles up to the top of the heaving mud, from the layers and layers of decaying leaves and plants and dead animals, to pop with a foul smell from the stagnant water and sear itself for ever into the oldest of brains on which the rest folded itself.

Lunch is silent, a row of cloves left on each plate, the atmosphere still dark. Even the cook has little to say; my preoccupation is effective.

The church is old, its gray stone covered by a dark red ivy, its square tower squat and low. It sits in the bottom of a humid valley, surrounded by trees, dripping with damp from the fogs and mists that rise up from its pond which is black, bottomless and without vegetation, where small boys fish without hope and bats cruise in the evening to drink. Only in mid-summer with a hot sun and clear sky when the pond appears blueish does one think of going to that spot without some official function to attend.

"You are looking well today."

I smile at the usher and give him my arm so that he can lead

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me to a secluded seat near one of the stained glass windows. The church is filled with white flowers, the organ plays discreetly. I hold myself stiff and straight, smiling and nodding when necessary. There is a lady with a white feather sitting in front of me, the white painted spine jerks annoyingly, the soft fluffy parts gracefully following after as she gossips without pause to the lady next to her. The church fills, your mother comes in and the service starts. You and she both appear, your face set in stone with marbled muscles. I stare, automatically doing what the congregation does, sitting standing kneeling and the thing lasts forever.

My mind wanders vaguely remembering that it usually is moved by the public nature of such affairs, that it has respect for ceremony and the rows of venerable members of the family who stand nostalgic, so wise, thinking profoundly, their thoughts rising together in unison, in prayer and worship to detach the church from its stone foundations and float it in the sky, blessing the young couple. The spring garden party hats are wet and damp, slightly askew from a run in the rain under a large black umbrella; I hear the voices and hymns through cotton wool padding, the minister is such a dull man and that woman with the feather is always talking to that other woman who has the wide open surprised eyes, while they have sweets to fill out their figures in tea rooms crowded with tables of women leaning toward each other, chatting and talking. I turn my eyes to the vaulted ceiling where there are stone flowers, roses, where the ribs of the vaulting join. I look at the stained glass window, it is open a crack, the saint tilted inwards with his feet out in the rain. Underneath the window a spider's web bounces up and down shivering with activity; the small black spider with yellow markings, her fat abdomen throbbing, rushes from one side to the other. A fly perhaps driven in by the storm has been caught and is giving the last shudders and buzzes of its wings before expiring and being wrapped up by the spider for a future meal. The storm continues; I can feel a fine spray of damp from the open window. I look back at the couple standing at the altar and listen, blocking out other inferference, to the rain on the windows and the wind in the trees. I am afraid of crying, laughing out loud, screaming hysterically. It is all a farce, I am chanting in time with the organ, slapping those two ladies on the back, telling them about you

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with a great grin on my face, rows of teeth showing; their faces fall in horror and when I am finished my face will fall and my grin will disappear. I'll be transformed into a witch to tell them dirty stories waving my long fingers and they will be able to scream in turn. That will shake them out of their terrible gabbyness, their endless gossip; that will drown and sink them below the surface of their imitation grass miniature golf courses where they nibble the false clover like rabbits eating appearances on the rounded contours of the brain.

The music stops, the people around me are putting on their coats, talking energetically. I wait until they have almost all gone and then leave. It is one of the parking attendants who holds the umbrella this time and I drive slowly throughly the long line of family cars out for their rainy Sunday afternoon drive.

The rain is pouring down on the tents, cold air blows the tablecloths away, men rush in their slick black raincoats to tighten the guy ropes and hold umbrellas. Angry shouts rise from the parking field which is a sea of mud and whirring tires. The house is lit with candles, steaming with damp wool, cheerful under the circumstances, the weather the only topic of conversation. Very few are outside under the tents where the rain makes such a roar that it is impossible to speak and be heard. When it lets up one hears the equally loud noise of the wind and the sound of dripping from the trees that shade the house. The afternoon darkens quickly, the light from the house and from the tents recedes illuminating fewer and fewer of the trees on the lawn.

I don't go through the reception line until late, the butler shouting my name to the mother of the bride, your face is preoccupied with something else, she smiles slightly her eyelids lowered halfway over her large eyes.

I leave them swaying, pouting my lips and sucking them back in between my teeth, chewing on the thin edge of a champagne glass crunching it into small pieces swallowing a few slivers smoothly and holding the others ready in my mouth. I use the jagged cup with tiny cracks showing all through it for those people who stand very close and for those who are more distant I spit the slivers that are in my mouth. As the person moves about, the splinters like splinters of wood will work deeper and deeper disappearing beneath

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the skin, the path then filled in behind with pus. These people will discover only at some later time that their skin has been penetrated, the pieces are so sharp that they enter without pain. Perhaps only then will they remember the little annoying things that I said while doing the damage. Fat ladies, thin ladies, ladies in purple sheaths, children with party manners and those without, stout men, drunk men, aunts and uncles with such sweet familiar smiles for me, ushers, bridesmaids; I circulate through the party leaving my path of devastation, waving my broken glass, out under the tents in the rain and the cold and into the smallest most intimate room where a couple is trying to be alone with only one small guttered candle and the shade drawn. The man rises to his feet embarrassed. But as I come back into a crowded room, my friend the usher spots my glass and takes it from me, its nest of slivers almost gone. He knows too much and says so before I can defend myself. I shake my head at him and he takes me by the arm and leads me through my victims, I nod to them smiling broadly, the tips of my teeth just touching. He finds my coat, helps me into it and waits with me at the door while the men struggle to find my car, his arm around my shoulders. Tears are beginning to come to my eyes, the rain mixing in. He leans out to look into my face as the car comes and wipes them away with his handkerchief, puts me in my car, turns and walks away without waving.

It is quiet, everyone is napping. John and Mary never go to weddings. I wander through the modern rooms airily light, pumped full of air like an animal that has an intact skin but is decomposing inside, the gas rising to the surface, underneath the skin. Walking into John's studio, I find a painting, on the easel, of a very somber tone not at all his usual palate. Leaning closer into the bumps and surfaces of the oil paint I see the squat tower and the long thin windows of the church, distorted, repeated many times with changing values, filling the canvas, upside down, sideways, swelling out rising always out of the dank pond that lies in the background, its depths receding away. Backing away careful not to prick my skin on the tacks that are for stretching canvas I knock down another painting that was lying against the wall, a painting of the marshes and sea done in squares of bright color, bright greens and blues, fresh and windy.

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They give me some tea later asking only a few discreet questions, and afterwards I leave for the city. The rain has let up. I drive through this country that I know so well, along the sea with tears pouring over my face dripping from my cheeks onto my lap. The black marshes and the sea roaring with storm breakers disappear behind me, the houses with their steady, unchanging lights, intruding into the landscape, and I remember that as she had moved up the aisle I had seen her long pointed legs, the yellow fuzz over all glowing irridescently, the round eyes filled with thousands of ommitidia, the waving feelers daintily working, her long segmented abdomen gold and black. I've seen them in summers past, sting prostrate bodies, their wings vibrating into a blur.

I catch up to a car winding along the black road and pass it on a straight stretch, my lights jumping up and down on the trees as my car bumps in the ruts of the road, and then enter into an open area of fields. The night is coming in clear and cold, the moon appears among the scattered clouds, then disappears illuminating their edges.

I have seen that moon before, reflecting itself off tiny waves, where rivers of light and black grass stretched for miles before us, and we could smell the sea air and hear the noise of the surf. I had been a guest for a summer weekend and had been lying on the warm grass beside the tennis courts with my head in my arms listening to the noises people make when they play tennis, when you were introduced to me. I climbed to my feet brushing off the grass to shake hands and that night you took me out onto the river to tell me stories and make me laugh, disturbing the roosting herons who flew silently away and you dipped the oars into the water and the ducks rose up from under the bow beating their wings against the water. I had thought that the days afterwards were days of endless time and of eyes that were no longer just organs of sight but organs that gave, light flowing out of them, a warm light, yellow sunlight that lifted, lightened each thing, that took a room and touched it into flame, taking it out of its atomic sense and bursting it into joy and the people in it disturbed into other worlds; touched at their very core, their own tiny flame springing up as the oxygen poured over it. But it wasn't so easy and the fields around me hide the meadow mice who crouch in their runs and burrows. When they squeak as

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the owl hoots they are caught pinioned beneath the sharp claws which precede the heavy body as it falls. I heard the hoot every once in a while, even in the city at night in the park near your house. When it comes, it strikes down deep into a group of cells in my body and the dread flows out winging its way in the form of miniature winged beasts who have only one clawed foot held out by two legs sheathed in feathers and purple moth scales. They have enormous heads, black curved hooking and scraping beaks, large round flat lemur eyes and they project themselves on the walls of children's bedrooms at night appearing suddenly big and frightening. When they approach adults, their claws clicking like women who play the piano with nails that are too long, they strike not with the unreasonable horror and fear that cause children to burrow deeper under their covers screaming for their mothers and babbling of shapes, but instead they carry diseases up to be seen. They pop at the surface of consciousness calling to me in their high pitched voices, talking of cancers and ulcers, the ageing of tissue, the dying of cells, and I look down to see my body transparent cleared and actively decaying. The warmth of the sunlight is fading fast, retreating, holding itself back, its eyes now doubtful and worried, suddenly deceived. The beasts are silent and fly around, scales falling off their feathers stuffing my head with fuzz.

You have turned your back and looked into other corners of life for temptations and satisfactions. You knew my ways and I hope that the ones you have chosen instead will give you gnawing doubts, that your dreams will wake you in the middle of the night and you will stare at the ceiling shaking your head trying to rid yourself of those voices which suggest that you might have made a mistake, that you took the fork in the road that led you not to the castle and the town which sits gray and many-turreted in the backgrounds of the old masters, but the other road that leads into the woods and shadows, down into the caves of hell where flames will always burn and flicker, slowly roasting the happiness which you think you have found. I don't want you to have great pains but subtle ones that catch you when you are least thinking about it: as you hold the door of your car for your wife sheathed to the ankle in black, or press the bell of an elevator and listen to it humming down the shaft toward you, or as the pigeons that have been walking

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before you in the park suddenly scatter into the air with annoying flapping noise that hurts the ears.

You have what they call the flat affect now. I look into your eyes and see a heavy curtain behind the lens; the eyes that used to smile out at me are schizophrenic. You draw the curtains back for your friends but when you see me the two sides come together so fast that the two approaching edges swing together overlapping and I am in the world you ignore. You talk to me of the voices you hear, of the man who taps your brain with wires, of high frequency rays, plots and religious hallucinations until I want to tear inside, shake up the contents and tell you that you are wrong, those things are not true but you just walk away back to your ward, back to your own world, shaking your head at me, smiling at my delusions and hopes.

You bastard, cold damn bastard. I open the window and scream into the night and those black waving fields, the edges of the trees, the broken sky and the circle of colors around the moon. The cold air and damp fill the car until I shiver. I turn on the radio, the heat and drive very fast putting my head out the window, the wind blowing tears into my eyes and then blowing them out along my cheeks and temples.

When was it that the other girl got up from where she lay on the warm grass, held out her hand, looked into your face and said something nice about your tennis that your mother used to tell me you practiced all day every day when you were a child, hitting the ball against the house? What did she say and do that was so different? Did you take her out into the marshes that night and did she hear the sea and see the rivers of black flecked with silver and kiss your lips sucking your life into hers? Was she sitting beside you in your apartment when you wrote to me saying just enough so that I came home as fast as possible? My friends came off the beach and out to the airport with me, and stood bunched together murmuring hopeful words that we all knew were absurd. The man next to me in the plane slept all the way and I dreamt, elaborating the ways in which I could sink my fist into his fat neck and cut off the heavy noisy breathing that rasped up down in his throat. I took the bus in from the airport with a stomach alternately geling up and melting in the sun but there was nothing I could do.

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Your face, a face talks to me, it is nice to have someone along for a long drive.

"Ma'am, they've got a machine in me, my chest has these iron slabs sewed in it that rub up and down under my skin. They put iron in my head and I can feel those beams beaming in and making me do things I don't want to do and all those people out there," he swings his arm with a wide gesture, "knows all about me. They says things about me." His eyes narrow. He picks at his nails. "They got me at work that's what I really care about though." He picks more at his nails. "They says things at work and it makes me nervous and I can't stand it and I got to watching and looking and there was little things that got me, like they put glass in my sandwiches. You know," he looks up from his nails, "ground glass that eats you up inside. But I saw it," he smiles, "and I didn't eat the sandwich; I took it home with me and flushed it down the toilet. On buses they got me too, looking at me all the time. My baby she's got a machine too, she doesn't know that I know, but I do. Sometimes I got to wear a wastebasket over my head, it keeps those beams out."

"You married?"

"Not yet, girlie, but I'm thinking about it. She's a cute kid, that baby of mine. Maybe I can fake her out of that machine she's got, the one with the beams." He's picking his nails again. "Even when we go dancing she's got the thing with her. I tell you, lady, you got to be careful with these people. Yeah, but I am going to marry her next month. We've decided to have the wedding down at my family's place."

"Congratulations, I'm so happy for you, and me, what happens to me? What did I do? Did I ever say I wasn't sure? You never asked me but I never saw anyone else."

"It's convenient to have a girl around for awhile. But you gotta watch those machines. They can destroy you. They got this high frequency stuff now and when they build in these plates they beam right in, so I keep a few others around just in case I get feelin' a bit hemmed in. You know some girls got more to offer than others. Now I gotta girl, not the one I'm going to marry but another one, I haven't know her very long, but I got a sort of a sneaking suspicion about her that maybe she would be better for me. She's got more class or something and I like the way she paints

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her nails. She's got a nice apartment too, and she smells good and she's got it where it counts. But I'll stick to the other for awhile. I did have another girl, but I think she tried to poison me, arsenic or something, like the girl at the factory where I work. I never drink the coffee they give you there, its full of some kind of stuff. They put it in because they got it in for me there. I once went down to the sea with my girl, the one I think I will marry, We took the train down there and sat on the beach, on a towel. But, Jesus, you know what happened? It was crowded, a lot of bodies, you understand, and they all got radios, those little deals. There was one beside every body. I couldn't stand it, the noise and the sea made me nervous too, I don't know, it must have been that sort of rhythmic noise it makes: swish, swish, but too slow for me. I like it quick and the waves were too far apart. My girl said there had been a storm and that makes fewer bigger waves. But all those radios, it was too easy for someone to beam in and my plates were getting hot in the sun and burning my skin from underneath so we had to leave, stepping over all those bodies, and take the train back in the heat and sweat."

"Oh sure. My beach was great this year too, covered with handsome men, each one a replica of you and I went out with a different one each night."

"Well, that's your mistake, lady. You've got to play it cool and you've got to watch out. You wait, everybody has got those machines now and when you are sleeping someone will put in those receiving plates and center in on you."

"But I should of said something about marriage, or loved him more or given him more or something. I lost him like you lose a fish that gets into the weeds and shakes the hook out, because you had a slack line."

"He had it in for you. He was playing. I had a girl once, she used to move her hips like this and she said nice things to me with her eyes half closed and her face close to mine smelling of nice perfume and clean sheets and a warm bed. She danced close, moving her hips into mine and rubbing her breasts on my shirt. She thought I had something she wanted, but when she found I didn't she went down to the factory one morning and told the girl there something about me. She went around to all the guys whispering little lies about

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me and my mother. That's when all the guys brought those little radios to work with them. Each guy now has one of those things on his bench. It makes me so goddamn nervous. It makes those plates I've got tingle. Have you ever had that shock stuff? They gave it to me once. I didn't know where I was for a couple of days. They said it made me better but they got those rays too and I found out after awhile. The cops brought me in that time I think."

"So what's the matter? How could I have believed in him?"

"Yeah, I used to wonder that too. In that hospital, these guys who come and talk to you and try to find out about you, asking questions about my family and all of that junk. I couldn't care less and besides they were out to get me, they've all got those little machines. Look, lady, I know. Now forget about this guy, everybody is out to get you. It ain't your fault see? You will come to my wedding won't you? If I marry this girl, I mean. Look at this city will you. Dirty, grubby, heavy. Just leave me off here on the corner. My girl lives up there."

The clearish air of the country has changed into fog, the lights are expanded in size and hazily sit above the streets. Rows and rows of identical houses squat beside the road; on each stoop an identical family group; father, mother, children, grandparents, relations, all smiling for the old daguerrotype, their faces full of the wrinkles and pock marks that photograph so well by that process. For days I stand with them on the third step from the bottom, my hair tight around my face posing for the dark funeral picture, breathing in the dust from the unpaved streets crowded with carriages and men on horseback that spray us with mud and disturb the photographer who hides under his black cloth. I remain until one of my friends taking a morning walk sees me there and mounting the steps, pushing the others aside, takes me by the hand, leads me away and sends me off to find some color.

You call the day I am leaving, to do what? Introduce me to your new wife?

"I am going away."

"I'll come and see you off."

You come, we talk and they call my flight and I get onto the airport bus.

You hadn't time to go to the airport.

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Steven Marcus

MR. ACTON OF QUEEN ANNE STREET, OR, THE WISDOM OF OUR ANCESTORS

[*The following essay is the first chapter of a study whose subject is writings about sex and sexuality in mid-nineteenth century England. The largest part of that body of literature consists of writings of a pornographic character, and it is toward an examination of such works that this essay moves.*

I have undertaken, in other words, to study one part of the sexual culture—more precisely the sexual sub-culture—of Victorian England. Because most of the material I deal with will be unfamiliar even to the educated reader, I have had to include longer passages of direct exposition than is usual in a critical essay. Such passages are compatible, however, with an intention which is at least in part anthropological, and I am aware that my use, in this connection, of the terms culture and sub-culture carries with it something of its anthropological sense.

In studying a sub-culture one ordinarily begins by setting or locating it in a larger and more familiar context or field of reference. The following essay also tries to effect such a location.]

Since this is a study of human fantasies, it may be useful to begin it by considering that official fantasy which in the mid-nineteenth century went by the name of scientific knowledge. I use the word fantasy not in a belittling or deprecatory sense but to describe the quality of thinking or of mind that one meets with in scientific or medical accounts of human sexuality in the English nineteenth century. This thinking, one soon learns, rests upon a mass of unargued, unexamined and largely unconscious assumptions; its logical pro-

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ceedings are loose and associative rather than rigorous and sequential; and one of its chief impulses is to confirm what is already held as belief rather than to adapt belief to new and probably disturbing knowledge. And as we shall see it shares all these qualities in common with pornography itself. No doubt most people think this way about most things most of the time—that is to say, a good deal of our thinking consists of fantasy cast in the form of opinion or assertion; or, in another context, such thinking has the characteristics of what sociologists call "ideology." Furthermore, no subject has had anything like the power to elicit such prepared responses as the subject of sexuality.

On the other hand, the Victorian era is very likely the earliest period in history for which such a study is easily possible. There is, in the first place, the question of the availability and extensiveness of published material. Then there is the fact that pornography and especially pornographic writing became an industry during this time—following, as it still tends to do, the course of development traced by the novel. In addition, the scientific spirit of the age found major expression in advances in the biological sciences and in medicine; and this, coupled with the strong social and reforming temper of the times made for a situation in which considerable public discussion of sexual matters took place. Like ourselves, the Victorians were inclined to regard important issues as "problems." Behind this attitude, of course, is an assumption that "problems" are there to be "solved" and have a "solution"; conversely, one suspects that if so many things are held in the mind as problems, a certain problematical quality will be given to the whole. Sex has always been a problem in human civilization, but not until some time during the nineteenth century, I think, did there emerge as part of the general educated consciousness the formulation that it might in fact be problematical—it is an idea that forms part of our inheritance. I can think of no more instructive illustration of these manifold tendencies, attitudes, contradictions and confusions than the writings of William Acton.

Though his name has long-since been forgotten, Acton was something of a figure in his own time. In his virtues he was a truly representative Victorian: earnest, morally austere yet liberally inclined, sincere, open-minded, possessed by the belief that it was his duty to work toward the alleviation of the endless human misery and suffering

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which sometimes seems to be the chief constituent of society. Acton was born in 1813, at Shillingstone, Dorsetshire, the second son of a clergyman. In 1831 he was enrolled as apprentice to the Resident Apothecary to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, where he worked until 1836. He then traveled to Paris, where he devoted himself to the study of what was to become his life's work, diseases of the urinary and generative organs. In Paris he studied under and became a permanent disciple of the well-known American genito-urinary surgeon, Philippe Ricord; during this period Acton also served for some time as an extern in the Female Venereal Hospital. In 1840, he returned to England, was admitted a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and began practice in his specialty. He was for some time, as well, Surgeon to the Islington Dispensary; and in 1842 became a Fellow of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London.

As a physician, it was said of him, Acton "was careful and safe . . . and had much technical skill," and it was not long before his practice became large. Sir James Paget, in his obituary notice of Acton, rather primly remarks that he "never used the opportunities of his large practice for an independent inquiry into the questions still remaining in the pathology of syphilis, and in the parts of general pathology which the study of syphilis may solve." He chose instead to become a writer, taking as his subject not only the diseases in which he was expert, but the social questions which were allied to them, such as illegitimacy and prostitution. (One of his papers, which I have not been able to obtain, is about "Unmarried Wet-Nurses"—the possibilities of this title seem positively Joycean.) His first book, published in 1841, was called *A Practical Treatise on Diseases of the Urinary and Generative Organs in Both Sexes,* and was successful enough to have gone through four editions by the time of Acton's death in 1875.

Acton first came before the public eye, however, through his writings on prostitution. He was one of the pioneers in the agitation, investigation, and discussion that finally led to the passage of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1866; this legislation provided that in certain areas where there were army encampments or naval stations or depots—such as Canterbury, Dover, Gravesend, Woolwich, and Aldershot—prostitutes be subject to periodical medical examination. Any woman who was found on examination to be diseased was

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hospitalized and treated at government expense; refusal to conform to the provisions of this act made her liable to be punished by imprisonment—this latter provision appears to have been largely unenforced or unenforceable. The first edition of this work was published some eight years before the Act was passed; the second, which came out in 1870, was much enlarged and revised, and incorporated Acton's observations on the workings of the new law. Its full, ringing title reads: *Prostitution, considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and other Large Cities and Garrison Towns, with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of its Attendant Evils.* And it is a very good book, certainly the best piece of work of its kind from the period that I have read. A brief examination of it will serve to introduce us to the quality of Acton's mind—at least to the quality of one side of it.

Acton's position can be straightforwardly outlined. Prostitution, he believed, was an inevitable, almost an organic, part of society. Efforts to repress or extirpate it have always ended in failure. At the same time, he argues, it would be "equally irrational . . . to imagine that this irrepressible evil can exist without entailing upon society serious mischief; though incapable of absolute repression, prostitution admits of mitigation. To ignore an ever-present evil appears a mistake as fatal as the attempt to repress it." The English habit of dealing with prostitution had been until then largely to ignore its existence; prostitution as it was practiced in England was, in the terminology of the times, free, private and clandestine, while on most of the Continent it was public, regulated, and licensed. Acton is too English himself, and too acutely aware of what the social possibilities in England were, to recommend the adoption of any system in which society through the agency of the State should appear to sponsor "immorality" by means of legalizing or licensing it. Yet he believes that it is "necessary to recognize its existence, and to provide for its regulation." Opposed by a combination of Podsnappery and religious extremism, by, as he puts it, "the dull stupidity that shuts its eyes to well-known evils, and by refusing to recognize accomplished facts and actual circumstances, endows them with a tenfold power of mischief, and which, while it justifies its inertness by religious theories, forgets the first practical duty of the Christian," Acton feels it necessary to come out strongly as "an advocate of RECOGNITION"

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—in capitals. (Which leads to the reflection that prostitution in Victorian England was the Red China of its day.) Acton's position then may be thought of as generally realistic, liberal, and Benthamite, a typical constellation of attitudes. He is concerned with the amelioration of a social evil, and for the intervention of government in a regulatory but minimal capacity. At the same time he feels it necessary to tip his hat toward the principles of personal liberty and *laissez-faire,* which had inevitably gotten involved in the discussion, and to "admit that a woman if so disposed may make profit of her own person, and that the State has no right to prevent her." Such an admission, of course, merely sharpens the horns of the dilemma on which this question—not to say Acton himself—is impaled, but we should recall that Acton is quite aware of the fact that it is a dilemma, and that all his choices are lesser evils.

One of Acton's chief purposes in this book is to humanize the prostitute, to educate or persuade his respectable audience to regard her not as some alien and monstrous creature but as a fellow human being. To this end he explodes the popular myth of the harlot's progress, demonstrating from his own professional experience that "such an ending of the harlot's life is the altogether rare exception . . . that the downward progress and death of the prostitute in the absolute ranks of that occupation are exceptional also, and that she succumbs at last, not to that calling, nor to venereal disease, but in due time, and to the various maladies common to respectable humanity." Moreover, he reports it as the general medical opinion "that no other class of females is so free from general disease" and that as a rule prostitutes are endowed with "iron bodies," with extremely resilient and resistant constitutions. He then goes on to institute this surprising comparison.

> If we compare the prostitute at thirty-five with her sister, who perhaps is the married mother of a family, or has been a toiling slave for years in the over-heated laboratories of fashion, we shall seldom find that the constitutional ravages often thought to be necessary consequences of prostitution exceed those attributable to the cares of a family and the heart-wearing struggles of virtuous labor.

These remarks may help to illuminate another side of the complex hostility which all the respectable classes of society directed toward

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the prostitute. Still worse, he shows that "by far the larger number of women who have resorted to prostitution for a livelihood, return sooner or later to a more or less regular course of life." The major part of London's army of whores were, in other words, transients, and Acton asserts that "prostitution is a transitory state, through which an untold number of British women are ever on their passage." Their re-entrance into decency took place in a variety of ways:—from finding work of some other kind, to opening small shops or lodging-houses, to emigration, and to marriage. This last route of escape seems to have been increasingly in use, and Acton calls attention to the frequency with which "the better inclined class of prostitutes become the wedded wives of men in every grade of society, from the peerage to the stable"; in addition, "as they are frequently barren, or have but a few children, there is reason to believe they often live in ease unknown to many women who have never strayed, and on whose unvitiated organization matrimony has entailed the burden of families." It stands to Acton's credit that having said this he goes on to assert that it is both the social duty and the social interest of the nation "to see these women through that state, so as to save harmless as much as may be of the bodies and souls of them." And all his recommendations for the treatment of prostitutes are in the direction of humanizing and rehabilitating them—though he is perfectly aware of how imperfect a success such efforts have achieved. As for those religious persons who opposed preventive and sanitary measures on the grounds that syphilis was "the penalty for sin," and that therefore syphilis should go unchecked and uncured because the chance of contracting it "is the strongest means of deterring men from being unchaste," he dismisses them with something less than the contempt they deserved, arguing instead—and characteristically—that like other deterrents before and since it didn't finally deter, which is true enough.

Acton is a rather gifted social observer. He notes, for example, that the world of prostitution is a "microcosm" of society at large, and that, chastity aside, it "exhibits, like its archetype . . . all the virtues and good qualities, as well as all the vices, weaknesses, and follies." Prostitutes, he remarks, "maintain their notions of caste and quality with all the pertinacity of their betters. The greatest amount of income procurable with the least amount of exertion, is with them, as with society, the grand gauge of position." There is a nice edge to that

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last sentence. He also offers some shrewd observations on the reciprocal relation between prostitution and the demand made in the respectable classes for money and position as the requirements for marriage. And there is no doubt in his mind that the chief cause of prostitution is "cruel biting poverty" and "the lowness of the wages paid to workwomen in various trades . . . unable to obtain by their labor the means of procuring the bare necessaries of life, they gain, by surrendering their bodies to evil uses, food to sustain and clothes to cover them. Many thousand young women in the metropolis are unable by drudgery that lasts from early morning till late into the night to earn more than from 3*s*. to 5*s*. weekly. Many have to eke out their living as best they may on a miserable pittance for less than the least of the sums above-mentioned." Is it any wonder, he asks, that "urged on by want and toil, encouraged by evil advisers, and exposed to selfish tempters, a large proportion of these poor girls fall from the path of virtue? Is it not a greater wonder that any of them are found abiding in it?" It is a question that was asked by Henry Mayhew and others before Acton, and that was asked repeatedly during the age. And it is a question that takes a good deal of answering—involving as it does the larger question of respectability and its social meaning. Acton reserves some of his harshest comments for the respectable classes, although there is never any doubt of where his own allegiance lies. And of course he disapproves of prostitution on moral grounds, reasoning that it offers satisfaction to only one part of man's inclinations at the expense of the rest. But he also—unlike many of his contemporaries—does not morally confuse prostitution with other kinds of illicit sexual relations, and asserts the need to "distinguish the indulgence of unlawful love from commerce with prostitutes; the one is the ill-regulated but complete gratification of the entire human being, the other affords gratification to one part only of his nature." However ambiguous the force of that term "ill-regulated," and however inadequate we may judge the vocabulary available to Acton, it seems clear that an effort to make the right kind of distinctions is going on.

Acton is also concerned for the state of the medical profession in England. When the first edition of this work was published in 1857, the London hospitals printed no statistical tables of their patients; by 1869 things had considerably improved, though it still

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remained impossible to form a reliable estimate of the number of prostitutes in London—figures ranging anywhere from 6,000 to 80,000 and above were offered. Nor was the exchange or gathering of knowledge from the private practice of physicians anything but primitive. "There is in our profession very little interchange of notes and statistics," he complains, "and no organized correspondence with any body or society, and I fancy no medical man could draw a sound deduction as to the greater or less prevalence of any particular disease from the state of his own practice." Such remarks call to mind Tertius Lydgate and George Eliot's description, in *Middlemarch,* of the state of medical practice in the England of an earlier generation. Indeed there are a number of correspondences between Lydgate and Acton, and in a curious way acquaintance with Lydgate has the effect so to speak of authenticating Acton, of filling him out, of making him seem less strange or out of the ordinary—which demonstrates how literature can sometimes help to retrieve the actuality of an unknown or forgotten person from the dust-heap of history. Both Lydgate and Acton studied in France, and it is to France that Acton turns whenever he wishes to form a comparison. The question of prostitution had received there consideration "which has been denied to it at home; experiments have been tried on the continent which we in England have hitherto declined to make." And he counsels his readers to shake off national prejudice and extend to foreign institutions the "patient and impartial examination that we would demand for our own." And he turns first to France, he says, not only as England's "nearest neighbor," but "as the country that has always led the way in the advance of modern civilization and the growth of modern ideas." Matthew Arnold's "note of provinciality" is not being sounded here, however remote from sweetness and light Acton's subjects may be. But it must be remembered to his honor, as Paget said, that "he practiced honorably in the most dangerous of specialties," and that "he wrote decently on subjects not usually decent."

As a writer, Acton has a kind of raw talent; his powers of observation are often acute, but they, like his prose, are equally often undisciplined and out of hand. Again the comparison with Lydgate is in order. Here, for example, are some extracts from Acton's account of a visit he made one "pleasant July evening" to Cremorne, the famous pleasure gardens in Chelsea.

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As calico and merry respectability tailed off eastward by penny steamers, the setting sun brought westward Hansoms freighted with demure immorality in silk and fine linen. By about ten o'clock, age and innocence . . . had seemingly all retired, weary with a long and paid bill of amusements, leaving the massive elms, the grass-plots, and the geranium-beds, the kiosks, temples, 'monster platforms,' and 'crystal circle' of Cremorne to flicker in the thousand gas-lights there for the gratification of the dancing public only. On and around that platform waltzed, strolled, and fed some thousand souls—perhaps seven hundred of them men of the upper and middle class, the remainder prostitutes more or less *pronouncées*. I suppose that a hundred couples . . . were engaged in dancing and other amusements, and the rest of the society, myself included, circulated listlessly about the garden, and enjoyed in a grim kind of way the 'selection' from some favorite opera and the cool night-breeze from the river.

The extent of disillusion he has purchased in this world comes forcibly home to the middle-aged man who in such a scene attempts to fathom former faith and ancient joys, and perhaps even vainly to fancy he might by some possibility begin again. I saw scores, nay hundreds, about me in the same position as myself. We were there—and some of us, I feel sure, hardly knew why—but being there, and it being obviously impossible to enjoy the place after the manner of youth, it was necessary, I suppose, to chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancies; and then so little pleasure came, that the Britannic solidity waxed solider than ever even in a garden full of music and dancing, and so an almost mute procession, not of joyous revellers, but thoughtful, careworn men and women, paced round and round the platform as on a horizontal treadmill. There was now and then a bare recognition between passers-by—they seemed to touch and go, like ants in the hurry of business . . . the intercourse of the sexes could hardly have been more reserved. . . . For my part, I was occupied, when the first chill of change was shaken off, in quest of noise, disorder, debauchery, and bad manners. Hopeless task! The pic-nic at Burnham Beeches, that showed no more life and merriment than Cremorne . . . would be a failure indeed, unless the company were antiquarians or undertakers. . . . The *gratus puellae risus* was put in a corner with a vengeance, under a colder shade than that of chastity

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> itself, and the function of the very band appeared to be to drown not noise, but stillness.
>
> The younger portion of the company formed the dances, and enjoyed themselves after the manner of youth, but I may fairly say, without offence to the most fastidious eye or ear. . . . The officiating member of the executive, Policeman T, had taken up an amiably discreet position, where his presence could in no way appear symptomatic of pressure, and the chances seemed to be, that had he stood so posed until his interference was necessary on behalf of public order, he might have been there to this day.
>
> Lemonade and sherry seemed to please the dancers, and the loungers indulged the waiters' importunity with a rare order for bitter-beer. A strongish party of undergraduates in drinking—all males—were deepening their native dulness in a corner with bottled stout, and more seasoned vessels struggled against depression with hot grog. In front of the liquor-bar . . . two rosy capitalists (their wives at Brighton or elsewhere) were pouring, for mere distraction's sake, libations of fictitious Möet, to the memory of auld lang syne with some fat old *dames de maison,* possibly extinct planets of the Georgian era. There was no drunkenness here to take hold of. As I have before recorded, there was among the general company barely vivacity, much less boisterous disorder. Let me try the assembly for immodest, brazen-faced solicitation by women. I declare my belief that I never saw the notoriously anti-sociable habit of English people more rigorously adhered to. Of the character of the female visitors . . . I could have little moral doubt, but it was clear enough that self-proclamation by any great number of them was out of the question. It was open to the male visitors to invite attention and solicit acquaintance. No gentlemanly proposition of the kind would have been rebuffed, no courteous offer of refreshment, possibly, declined, but I am firmly of opinion, that had the most eligible men present tarried in hopes of overtures from the other side, they might have been there yet, with Policeman T.

This is a surprising bit of writing. Though it is a description of an occasion for "pleasure," the passage it should be put alongside of is Dickens's description in *Little Dorrit* of a London Sunday evening. The quality of depression in both is similar. It may also serve as a

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representative sample of Acton's prose: its virtues are self-evident; its shortcomings combine a tendency to garrulousness and repetition with the use of ready-made phrases or cliché—he clearly often wrote in haste. But the passage is also characterized by a peculiar confusion; one is never quite certain of the source or location of its intense and frozen sadness. The depression is there in the scene itself, but it is also present in Acton, and not merely as a response to what he is observing but as something he has brought to this event and projects onto it. This inability to separate out satisfactorily what one must call the subjective and objective components of an experience indicates, I think, a dimmed consciousness, and further a disinclination to examine the contents or meaning of one's responses. One thinks again of Lydgate; and the famous "spots of commonness" which George Eliot ascribed to him tincture the complexion of Acton's mind as well. Yet it would be too harsh to continue criticism of *Prostitution* along these lines. It could not have been an easy book to write, it stands out among contemporary works on this subject, and it represents a genuine effort of the humane intelligence.

II

Acton's best-known and most popular work is called *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs.* It was first published in 1857; within a year a second edition was called for; a translation into French was made in 1863, from the third edition; it went through a number of editions in America, and was still being printed twenty years after Acton's death, an eighth edition coming out in Philadelphia in 1894. The currency of this work seems to have been in accord with what was then thought of as qualified opinion, for the book received excellent notices in the medical press. "In the work now before us," said *The Lancet,* "all essential detail upon its subject matter is clearly and scientifically given. We recommend it accordingly, as meeting a necessary requisition of the day, refusing to join in that opinion which regards the consideration of the topics in question as beyond the duties of the medical practitioner." The "topics in question" are sex, and *Functions and Disorders* is an account of human sexuality, a subject which, Acton writes in his introduction, still needs "much elucidation." Until recently, he states, "many

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standard surgical writers on the generative system have practically ignored the functional aspect of their subject; dealing with the whole of the wonderful and complex machinery of which they treat, as if the offices it fulfills, the thousand feelings it affects, the countless social, moral, and scientific interests with which it is so intimately connected, were of little or no moment." Acton's purpose is to supply this defect and to "investigate these subjects in the same calm and philosophic spirit with which all other scientific inquiries should be approached." Furthermore, he writes in a preface to the fourth, revised edition, he has devoted much care to "the minute weighing of every sentence," hoping thereby to achieve a precise and unobjectionable treatment "of a subject so novel and difficult, and in many respects painful." I do not include these statements in order to play the easy game of "showing up the past" but to convey a sense of what Acton, and probably his readers, thought he was doing.

The full title of the work is *The Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs, in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life, Considered in their Physiological, Social and Moral Relations.* It is an admirably comprehensive designation, and the first comment on it must be that it is altogether misleading and inaccurate. The book is entirely about men and male sexuality. With the exception of two extremely short but significant passages not a word is said about women. The first implications of this discrepancy are to say the least odd: do women not have reproductive organs; or, alternatively, if they do, do they not have functions or fall into disorders? Moreover, Acton seems perfectly unconscious of the fact that he has anything to account for in this connection, and at no point does he feel it necessary to explain what in charity we may call the disproportions of his work—obviously there is nothing to explain. This kind of dislocated awareness serves to introduce us to the world of this book; it is a world part fantasy, part nightmare, part hallucination, and part madhouse. Yet we should recall that it was written by the author of that eminently sane work on prostitution—the operations of the mind are never simple, to coin a phrase.

Acton begins by describing the "Normal Functions in Childhood."

> In a state of health no sexual impression should ever affect a child's mind or body. All its vital energy should be employed

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> in building up the growing frame, in storing up external impressions, and educating the brain to receive them. During a well-regulated childhood, and in the case of ordinary temperaments, there is no temptation to infringe this primary law of nature. The sexes, it is true, in most English homes, are allowed unrestricted companionship. Experience shows, however, that this intimacy is in the main unattended with evil results. . . . At any rate, in healthy subjects, and especially in children brought up in the pure air, and amid the simple amusements of the country, perfect freedom from, and indeed total ignorance of, any sexual affection is, as it should always be, the rule. The first and only feeling exhibited between the sexes in the young should be that pure fraternal and sisterly affection. . . . Thus it happens that with most healthy and well-brought up children, no sexual notion or feeling has ever entered their heads, even in the way of speculation. I believe that such children's curiosity is seldom excited on these subjects except where they have been purposely suggested.

In short, the normal functions are non-functional. We need not linger over the fact that this passage is untrue; the quality of thinking present in it is of equal interest. In the first place, doubt is built into its very syntax. The conditional and the indicative are used almost interchangeably or as equivalents, and one of the effects of this is to suggest that "normality" is a precarious, wished-for, and achieved state as much as it is the state which in the common way of things is "normally" found. That is to say, the overt statement of this passage is expressed in terms which reveal a countering direction of thought or impulse. Secondly, "the simple amusements of the country" obviously exclude the sight of horses, cows, sheep, pigs, rabbits, and chickens. In order for this sentence to have passed unremarked, a good deal of collective amnesia must have taken place, and a good deal of folk-knowledge and traditional rural lore been repressed or denied. And the tenor of the entire passage makes it possible for us to guess at the audience to which this work is directed. It is precisely not an audience which has had an extensive living experience of rural life. Nor can it be an audience which has had—or which *remembered*—extensive experience of urban poverty, since childhood knowledge and experience of sex seems to have been both universal

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and universally acknowledged among the urban poor.[1] It is obviously directed at an audience composed of the urban middle classes, for only among those classes could there be found that combination of circumstances—living conditions, ideology, estrangement from traditional knowledge—which made possible a belief in the asexuality of childhood. (And as we shall see even this is untrue.) But it is also an audience which has a need to read about sex, which is troubled by sexual ignorance and fear, and which has a consciousness of sexuality as a problem.

This is confirmed by what follows, for having spent a page and a half describing the "normal" asexual functions of childhood, he devotes the next twenty-odd pages to a discussion of sexual "disorders" in childhood, and communicates unmistakably the sense that childhood sexual play and childhood masturbation were both widespread and well-known phenomena. To be sure, he disapproves of these practices, but he does not deny their existence or prevalence. We are faced then with a double or contradictory consciousness. On the one hand children are spoken of as pure and innocent and sexually quiescent; on the other, they are described as constantly threatened by horrid temptations, open to stimulation and corruption, and in danger of becoming little monsters of appetite. There is nothing to mediate between these two extreme states, no middle ground or connection between them. And the contradiction that children are both at once remains altogether unconscious.

The causes of this sexual "precocity" are legion. They include hereditary predisposition, "irritation of the rectum arising from worms," bed-wetting, irritation of the "glans penis arising from the collection of secretion under the prepuce," and, in boys who do suffer from such irritation, manipulation of the penis while washing it in order to reduce the original stimulus—these youngsters seem to have had it. Although Acton is not an advocate of circumcision, he finds the foreskin a dangerous nuisance for both sanitary and moral reasons. "It affords an additional surface for the excitement of the reflex action, and aggravates an instinct rather than supplies a want," he writes in a footnote. "In the unmarried it additionally excites the sexual desires, which it is our object to repress"—he is nothing if not

1. In his book on prostitution, Acton himself points this out.

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candid. Other causes are flogging on the buttocks, as it was practiced in the large public schools, and indeed life at school in general. Just as in pornography no person, object, or idea is incapable of being enlisted in the cause of sexual activity, in Acton's view of the world almost no experience is exempt from the danger of prematurely awakening appetite in the young. And though Acton regards with apprehension what is pornography's *raison d'etre,* in both the same process is taking place—the complete sexualization of reality.

Another important source of premature sexual activities is premature intellectual growth, and Acton reproves those tendencies in modern education whose aim is to foster intellectual superiority at the expense of more "wholesome" exercises. "For, as any one may observe," he remarks, "it is not the strong athletic boy, fond of healthy exercise, who thus early shows marks of sexual desires, but your puny exotic, whose intellectual education has been fostered at the expense of his physical development." There are more fantasies going on simultaneously in this sentence than one can easily count, and the logic of the statement is, to say the least, peculiar. Putting these to one side, however, we should note that such a passage raises a question which we shall be forced to raise repeatedly: what, at a given moment in the history of a culture, is the nature of "observation"; and correlatively what is the nature of "experience." As we shall have repeated occasion to see, both observation and experience are extremely selective—that is, extremely pre-conditioned—processes. Acton continues his observations by saying that the chief danger in early intellectual development is that boys will read works, especially "classical works," which are almost "certain to excite sexual feelings"; and although he has no wish to be "prudish or to believe that boys can or ought to be altogether kept from the risk of reading improper stories or books," the dangers of such a course must be faced.

> He reads in them of the pleasures, nothing of the penalties, of sexual indulgences. He is not intuitively aware that, if the sexual desires are excited, it will require greater power of will to master them than falls to the lot of most lads; that if indulged in, the man will and must pay the penalty for the errors of the boy; that for one that escapes, ten will suffer; that an awful risk attends abnormal substitutes for sexual intercourse; and that

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> self-indulgence, long pursued, tends ultimately, if carried far enough, to early death or self-destruction.[2]

The child is father of the man—and with a vengeance. With this passage we come upon the prevailing tone of this book; it is a characteristic Victorian tone. It is resonant of danger, doom, and disaster (to strike a Faulknerian note), and tells us of a world hedged in with difficulty and pain, a world of harsh efforts and iron consequences. In such a world reality is conceived of as identical with pain, and negative conscience is the ruling principle. It is a vision of life which is in every way the exact opposite of the vision of life in pornography, and is therefore its counterpart as well. And we can anticipate by saying that the closer such an account comes to being consciously held as official doctrine, the more inevitably will the extrusion from it of an under-world or under-life of pornography occur.

Acton has some suggestions to make about the prevention and cure of sexual activities in children. His first recommendation is that parents closely "watch their children," and this admonition is repeated so often that one begins to feel that were it taken seriously every middle-class Victorian home would have turned into a small Elsinore —and parents would have become, in Claudius's words, "lawful espials," terrorists of secret observation. As for the rest, Acton's suggestions are harmless enough; there is, we ought to recall, nothing of the quack about him. Boys should undergo a regimen of "gymnastic exercises regularly employed and carried to an extent just short of fatigue"—a nice distinction. He counsels the regular use of the sponge-bath, though showering and swimming are not without their dangers: it must not be forgotten, he says, "that the habit of remaining long in the water may be as great a source of evil as anything." Life at school presents such insuperable problems that Acton largely contents himself with generally supporting Dr. Arnold's reforms: without a substantial raising of the moral tone in schools, which can only be achieved through marshalling "public opinion" on the

2. For a different, and more enlightened, handling of this subject by a contemporary French physician, see Raymond De Saussure, "J. B. Felix Descuret," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* II, New York (1947), 417-424. At the same time, however, compare Bertram D. Lewin, "Child Psychiatry in the 1830's—Three Little Homicidal Monomaniacs," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* III/IV, New York (1949), 489-493.

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side of virtue, little can be done. On one point, however, he is insistent; every boy should have a separate bed, for "evil practices are, I believe, most frequently learnt and practiced in bed." Obviously Acton does not believe that the auto-erotic can also be an auto-didact. He then closes this section by printing two letters, one from a clergyman, the other from "a member of one of the universities, who was formerly at a large public school." These letters are so abject in their ignorance, and express such an agonized consciousness of shame and difficulty in discussing these topics, yet at the same time are so serious and earnest in their desire for enlightenment and direction, that one is forced to withhold hasty judgment on an undertaking like Acton's. These letters are representative, and what they reveal is a pitiable alienation on the part of a whole class of men from their own sexuality. Acton's work must be understood as both an expression of this condition and as one of the early efforts to overcome it.

If childhood has its sexual dangers and temptations, those that beset youth "are increased tenfold," and are "infinitely harder to overcome, infinitely more ruinous if yielded to." Although sexual desire in youth is a "natural instinct," and has its own "beneficent purpose . . . mature and lawful love," the young man is to be warned against fulfilling that desire. Indeed, "such indulgence is *fatal*. It may be repented of. Some of its consequences may be, more or less, recovered from. But, from Solomon's time to ours, it is true that it leads to a 'house of death.' " There is a kind of exquisite hopelessness in that "more or less." And what makes this bad situation even worse is that the youth neither feels nor knows this. "He does not know that to his immature frame every sexual indulgence is unmitigated evil. He does not think that to his inexperienced mind and heart every illicit pleasure is a degradation, to be bitterly regretted hereafter —a link in a chain that does not need many to be too strong to break." We find ourselves here in a familiar setting; roughly speaking, it is the moral world of the Victorian novel. It is a world of nemesis, of unbreakable chains of consequences; it is a scene of incessant struggle against temptation, and in which the first false step leads irresistibly to the last. The fact that in the novel this style of thinking is largely applied—and often with great subtlety—to general moral and social behavior is not immediately to the point; what is to be

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noted is that the same kind of mental process is going on in both. And that what in the novel made and still makes sense should in such a case as Acton's seem as good as insane is something of an indigestible paradox, no matter how we regard it.

Incontinence in all forms is harmful, but the "most vicious" form it can take is that of masturbation. Here is Acton's description of a boy who habitually masturbates.

> The frame is stunted and weak, the muscles undeveloped, the eye is sunken and heavy, the complexion is sallow, pasty, or covered with spots of acne, the hands are damp and cold, and the skin moist. The boy shuns the society of others, creeps about alone, joins with repugnance in the amusements of his schoolfellows. He cannot look any one in the face, and becomes careless in dress and uncleanly in person. His intellect has become sluggish and enfeebled, and if his evil habits are persisted in, he may end in becoming a drivelling idiot or a peevish valetudinarian. Such boys are to be seen in all stages of degeneration, but what we have described is but the result towards which *they all* are tending.

This passage teaches us that masturbation was unquestionably at the bottom of all Uriah Heep's troubles. But it teaches us other things as well. In the first place this description is a commonplace—scores of others from the period exactly like it might be cited. It occupied, therefore, the status of official belief, and this leads us to question both the relation between belief and experience or behavior, and the influence that belief can exercise on them. We can reasonably assume that masturbation was practiced among adolescents to about the same extent then as it is now—that is to say, it was as good as universal (Acton himself admits this). And we know too that most adolescents did not correspond to Acton's description of the masturbator, and that the largest part of them grew up to be what for want of a better word we must call normal males. Clearly then either an assertion of common-sense founded upon experience must have occurred, or, what is more likely, the process of isolation was enlisted as a defense—the same process, say, which permits persons of genuine religious belief to transgress without excessive discomfort, and which permits us to hold contradictory feelings in the mind without an overwhelming sense of their contradiction. On the other hand, this description,

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however fantastic its confusion of cause with effect, cannot be written off as pure fantasy: it is based on observation. And there can be little doubt that in this period of history we confront a situation characterized not merely by extreme disturbance and guilt over masturbation, and sexuality in general, but by the emergence of those feelings into general organized consciousness in the form of such beliefs.

Of all the thousand natural shocks which flesh is heir to, masturbation seems the worst, and there is no doubt in Acton's mind "that it is the cause of disease." Among the multitude of afflictions that it can cause are impotence, consumption, curvature of the spine, and of course insanity. He then quotes from a contemporary treatise on "an inquiry into a frequent cause of insanity in young men" this description of certain inmates of an asylum for the insane.

> Engaged in no social diversion, the patients of this group live alone in the midst of many. In their exercise they choose the quietest and most unfrequented parts of the airing-grounds. They join in no social conversation, nor enter with others into any amusement. They walk alone, or they sit alone. If engaged in reading, they talk not to others of what they may have read; their desire apparently is, in the midst of numbers, to be in solitude. They seek no social joys, nor is the wish for fellowship evinced.
>
> The pale complexion, the emaciated form, the slouching gait, the clammy palm, the glassy or leaden eye, and the averted gaze, indicate the lunatic victim to this vice.
>
> Apathy, loss of memory, abeyance of concentrative power and manifestation of mind generally, combined with loss of self-reliance, and indisposition for or impulsiveness of action, irritability of temper, and incoherence of language, are the most characteristic mental phenomena of chronic dementia resulting from masturbation in young men.

It might be difficult to find a more apt or prettier description of the romantic artist: the Ancient Mariner, the poet of "Alastor," Endymion, any one of Byron's early heroes fit this bill of particulars. This hardly indicates that these characters masturbated themselves into insanity; it does serve to show, however, how in a single culture one

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set of descriptive terms is forced into the service of representing a variety of states, in this case extreme states of mental alienation. One further fact that is noted but left unexplained is that these cases "chiefly occur in members of families of strict religious education . . . those who from this cause have become insane have generally . . . been of strictly moral life, and recognized as persons who paid much attention to the forms of religion." In addition, "in the acute attack resulting from this cause . . . religion forms a noted subject of conversation or delusion." Masturbation causes insanity; religion seems somehow connected with this process, but the connection goes unexplored—which can only lead us to conclude that the process by which causality is ascribed is often highly selective and tendentious.

If masturbation—and sex in general—causes all these horrors, how does the cause operate? With this we come to the informing idea of sexuality in the era before Freud. In the masturbating boy, "the large expenditure of semen, has exhausted the vital force." The continent boy, however, has "not expended that vital fluid, semen, or exhausted his nervous energy, and his youthful vigor has been employed for its legitimate purpose, namely, in building up his growing frame." Although Acton does not endorse the old formula by which it was calculated that an ounce of semen was equivalent to forty ounces of blood, he continually warns his readers that the semen "is a highly organized fluid, requiring the expenditure of much vital force in its elaboration and in its expulsion." The fantasies that are at work here have to do with economics; the body is regarded as a productive system with only a limited amount of material at its disposal. And the model on which the notion of semen is formed is clearly that of money. Science, in the shape of Acton, is thus still expressing what had for long been a popular fantasy: up until the end of the 19th century the chief English colloquial expression for the orgasm was "to spend."[3] It had not yet been displaced by the modern "to come"—a complex shift in metaphoric emphasis whose meaning is not at all clear. Furthermore, the economy envisaged in this idea is based on scarcity and has as its aim the accumulation of its own product. And the fantasy of pornography is this idea's complement, for the world of pornography is a world of plenty. In it all men are

3. See "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame."

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infinitely rich in substance, all men are limitlessly endowed with that universal fluid currency which can be spent without loss. Just as in the myth Zeus descends upon Danaë in a shower of gold, so in pornography the world is bathed, floated, flooded, inundated in this magical produce of the body. No one need ever worry again about husbanding nature's riches from expense.

Behind these images we can make out two further ideas. One is a universal personal and cultural experience of poverty—and fear of it. The other is that the human body is a machine, and that sexual functions are essentially mechanical. Acton regards sexuality and sexual disorders as strictly physiological functions—there is no such thing yet as psychology, and the world he describes is pre-psychological in nature, as is the world of pornography. At this moment in history, then, scientific thinking about sex had attained the same level of intellectual development as pornography. And just as the advent of a genuine modern psychology was to spell an end to the kind of thinking represented in Acton's work, so we shall see psychology is the one mortal enemy of pornography. Yet we should also observe that Acton's physiology is itself a fantasy; it is a fantasy physiology, and the fantasy expresses to the full the unconscious psychology which created it. It is a classic example of what Freud called "the return of the repressed."

What then is the prevention, cure, or solution for all these dangers? Acton's one recommendation is continence, which consists not only in sexual abstinence "but in controlling all sexual excitement." True continence, he writes, "is complete control over the passions, exercised by one who knows their power, and who, but for his steady will, not only could, but would indulge them." And he is under no illusion that such a practice will not be a trial, a sore and bitter trial, as he says. Continence in other words is a variant form of that essential nineteenth century idea, Duty; and Acton gives to the word its full weight of difficulty, conflict, pain, and necessity. (Duty, or continence, may have been as George Eliot said "peremptory and absolute"; it never was, or is, easy.) The first requisite of continence is "that power of the mind over outer circumstances which we call 'a strong will.' " This sovereignty of the will, of man over himself, is of course "a matter of *habit*. Every victory strengthens the victor. . . . The whole

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force of his character, braced and multiplied by the exercise of a lifetime, drives him with unwavering energy along his chosen course of purity." These are admirable ideas, and one is right to take them as representative of an epoch of culture, in both its strengths and weaknesses. Placed as they are, however, in this context of darkness, danger, and fear, they appear more as gallant ineffectualities, resolute impossibilities than they do as practical solutions. For although the will is a form of consciousness and is consciously employed, its energies have historically been directed against consciousness itself—against intellect, introspection, self-examination, curiosity. Will is, in other words, a controlled consciousness which often contains within itself a fear of consciousness. And however much Acton is for the consciously willed direction of life, he is unequivocally against turning it inwards; and he holds up Rousseau as a horrible example of what happens when a man "pries into his mental and moral character with a despicably morbid minuteness." This sort of "hideous frankness," he believes, can only lead to a perpetuation of the condition which it unjustifiably reveals.

Acton carries this idea one step further in his discussion of "nocturnal emissions or pollutions"—which are just about as undesirable, dangerous, and controllable as masturbation. If while he is awake a man "who has not debased and enervated his will is perfectly able to keep his thoughts entirely pure," then it is hardly less difficult for him to exercise the "power of keeping his dreaming thoughts pure, if he goes the right way to work." To those patients who complain that they cannot control their dreams, Acton delivers a properly authoritative reproach. "This is not true," he flatly declares. "Those who have studied the connection between thoughts during waking hours and dreams during sleep, know that they are closely connected. The *character* is the same sleeping or waking . . . if a man has allowed his thoughts during the day to rest upon libidinous subjects, he finds his mind at night full of lascivious dreams. . . . A will which in our waking hours we have not exercised in repressing sexual desires, will not, when we fall asleep, preserve us from carrying the sleeping echo of our waking thoughts farther than we dared to do in the daytime." Without pausing to analyze the confused mixture of half-truths, quasi-observations, wishful thinking, received ideas, and pure affirmative flummery in these remarks, we

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must ask ourselves what ideas lie behind these assertions and make them possible. Acton himself provides the answer, when he remarks the "very curious" disposition in the human system "to repeat an act and establish a habit." We notice this disposition "in children who wet their beds. Another instance is that of going to stool at a particular hour. Once establish the time of the bowels acting, and they act with regularity. So with emissions, if they occur one night they are likely to occur the next, and the next. The secret of success is to *break the habit.*" The sexual hygiene of continence is unmistakably founded on the idea of bowel control, and the connection of this with the fantasy of semen as money is self-explanatory. At the same time, to regard the genital organization from the point of view of anal-economic regulation is to introduce another series of contradictions. It is to assimilate the idea of money, or of life-giving value, to the idea of waste, of dirt, of poison; and it is hopelessly to confuse the two. In Dickens's later works, especially *Our Mutual Friend,* the social ramifications of this process are memorably represented. In Acton, however, these contradictions never emerge into consciousness, and the youth who has learned to control his sphincter should by the same token be able to constipate his genitals.[4]

III

If the youth has learned his lessons and has been lucky enough to surmount or bypass the dangers that lurk on every side, then he should reach adult life or manhood relatively undamaged. At this time, he is able to experience "all those mysterious sensations which make up what we call VIRILITY." This distinctive attribute "seems necessary to give a man that consciousness of his dignity, of his character as head and ruler and of his importance, which is absolutely essential to the well-being of the family, and through it, of society

4. For a slightly eccentric but preternaturally learned and precise account of the history of mechanical devices used to prevent masturbation, see Eric John Dingwall, *Male Infibulation* (London, 1925), and *The Girdle of Chastity* (London, 1931).
The reader may be interested to know that as late as 1921, in the second edition of *Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaften* (Leipzig), p. 627, Havelock Ellis and Albert Moll were still able to recommend *"Onaniebandagen"* or *"Korsette"*—little metal suits of armor fitted over the genitals and attached to a locked belt—as prophylaxis for masturbation.

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itself. It is a power, a privilege, of which the man is, and should be, proud. . . ." But this power is as precarious as ever, if not more so, and the terrors of sex in maturity are as threatening as they were before, and their numbers have if anything increased. Although Acton states that "the moderate gratification of the sex-passion in married life is generally followed by the happiest consequences to the individual," he obviously believes that few ever achieve this modest consummation. The consequences of sexual excess now include heart failure and loss of memory, and the rites of the marriage bed though sacred are perilous. Those who were continent before marriage become incontinent after it, intercourse is "indulged in night after night," and the result, at least for the man, "is simple ruin"—he goes bankrupt and is sold up. Such a man, however unconscious he may be of the fact, has been "guilty of great and almost criminal excess"—like the head of a company who has invested wildly in shares. Acton then cites a specimen case of this condition.

> A medical man called on me, saying he found himself suffering from spermatorrhoea. There was general debility, inaptitude to work, disinclination for sexual intercourse, in fact, he thought he was losing his senses. The sight of one eye was affected. The only way in which he lost semen was, as he thought, by a slight occasional oozing from the penis. I asked him at once if he had ever committed excesses. As a boy, he acknowledged having abused himself, but he married seven years ago, being then a hearty, healthy man, and it was only lately that he had been complaining. In answer to my further inquiry, he stated that since his marriage he had had connection two or three times a week, and often more than once a night! This one fact, I was obliged to tell him, sufficiently accounted for all his troubles. The symptoms he complained of were similar to those we find in boys who abuse themselves. It is true that it may take years to reduce some strong, healthy men, just as it may be a long time before some boys are prejudicially influenced, but the ill effects of excesses are sooner or later sure to follow.

This is all classically familiar material, but one is none the less prompted to wonder: if the consequences of sexual intercourse are indistinguishable from those of masturbation then why marry? More-

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over, the mental consequences are also the same. "Experience every day convinces me," he writes, "that much of the languor of mind, confusion of ideas, and inability to control the thoughts of which married men complain, arises from the sexual excesses they commit. This occurs not unfrequently from their marrying late in life, and still more often from their marrying a second time after having been widowers for some years." We may observe that the state of being a husband was already well on its way to becoming the condition of permanent crisis that it is today. The causes are naturally thought to be different—they are in fact reversed—but the state of emotions is remarkably similar.

In the passage I have just quoted, Acton uses the word "spermatorrhoea," a catch-all term which he defines as "a state of enervation produced, at least primarily, by the loss of semen." Along with tuberculosis, it appears to have been one of the virtually universal afflictions of the time; and it is allied to the various forms of impotence, which Acton deals with at some length. (One of the purposes of his work was to warn his readers against the innumerable quacks who offered to cure impotence by means of nostrums, potions, and magical drugs or machines.) Spermatorrhoea is itself a piece of magic, since it can be both cause and effect of almost anything. It can be the result of sexual excess, but then it can just as well be the result of intellectual excess, mental exertions having apparently the same consequences as sexual athletics. At this point the Victorian doctrine of work, achievement, and accomplishment in the world turns around on itself, and the man who has created himself throughout a life-time of unremitting concentration may find his success blighted by the very efforts that assured it. "The quality of the semen, and the exhaustion of the system which secretes it," Acton observes, "must have a great influence on the progeny. May not the fact observed by all ages, that the children of great men are not usually equal to their sires, depend among other causes, upon deterioration of the impregnating fluid in the parent from the great mental demand upon him at the time impregnation took place?" In one respect, at least, self-help and self-abuse seem indistinguishable. At the same time, such a passage expresses a comprehensive Victorian attitude—that life is difficult, necessitous, and laced with tragic contradiction.

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Whichever way it is regarded, life is terrible and tragic—dark, complex beyond fathoming, incoherent, certain of suffering, unavoidably to be endured. Yet beneath all the fantasies (and being expressed through them), beneath all the ignorance there is an emotion that sets the tone of this book and all it represents. This emotion is fear—fear of sex in general and particular: of impotence and of potency; of impulse and of its loss; of indulgence and even of the remedies prescribed to curb it. These fears it may be said are universal and exist in all societies or cultures; and all societies and cultures have devised means of dealing with them. In the Victorian world, however, what seems to have happened is that these fears have been raised into consciousness along with certain of their contradictions; and it is the sense of irreparable contradiction that speaks out most strongly from Acton's pages.

Thus, although spermatorrhea is a universal danger, it is no more dangerous than its opposite, ungratified sexual excitement. To Acton, the "excitement of the sexual feelings when not followed by the result which it should produce, is . . . an unmitigated evil." This evil produces exactly the same dreadful consequences for health as uninhibited sexual indulgence. Young men are likely to become impotent as a result of prolonged sexual excitement which is for one reason or another not gratified, and older men, particularly those who are married to younger women, will pay the penalty of excited abstinence "by becoming martyrs to paralysis, softening of the brain, and driveling idiotcy." Whichever way one turns, then, things are terrible. Sex is thought of as a universal and virtually incurable scourge. It cannot ultimately be controlled, and serves as a kind of metaphor for death, as cancer does today. Some fifty years after Acton, Freud was to discover that all thought was capable of being sexualized, and that even the most abstruse intellectual interests have a sexual origin and are endowed with a charge of unconscious sexual energy. In the age before Freud, in the writings of such a figure as Acton, it is physiological sex which is universal and universally protean; yet this very physiology illustrates the point of Freud's idea.

What of woman in this world of torment and fear? As I mentioned before, women are discussed in only two places in Acton's

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book.[5] They appear in a section devoted to "Marriage," and at first sight seem to offer an escape from the nightmare of sexuality. "It is a delusion under which many a previously incontinent man suffers," writes Acton, "to suppose that in newly married life he will be required to treat his wife as he used to treat his mistresses. It is not so in the case of any modest English woman. He need not fear that his wife will require the excitement, or in any respect imitate the ways of a courtezan." This passage contains a cluster of interesting assumptions. It assumes, in the first place, and as a matter of public knowledge, that large numbers of Victorian middle-class men will have had mistresses—who were courtesans. It further assumes that the Victorian wife will not have sexual desires, and as a corollary adds that courtesans or mistresses are in themselves extremely sexual; both of these assumptions seem at least open to question. (It may be useful to note that modern "marriage manuals" reverse the formulation offered by Acton.) The operative word in the passage is of course "fear"; it further underscores the fantasy-conception of sexuality in Acton's work. But it also indicates to what extent this conception is both analogous to and the counterpart by opposition of the fantasies of pornography. In pornography, all women—including wives—are excited and behave like courtesans all the time. Since women are not like this, there is a natural temptation to conjecture that the persistence of the pornographic fantasy is somehow connected with this fact. It is indeed connected, but it cannot be accounted for by such a single, simple functional explanation.

But marriage alone is not enough of a safeguard—for either man or woman. Pregnancy and child-bearing seem to be the only reliable means of stifling sexual desire.

> If the married female conceives every second year, during the nine months that follow conception she experiences no

5. This represents a change from the older and pre-medical science writings about sex. In *Aristotle's Master Piece,* the mostly widely-circulated work of sexual and proto-medical folklore in the English 17th and 18th centuries, the emphasis falls in the other direction, and considerably more space is given to the dispensing of information about female sexual functions than is given to describing those functions in the male.
See also Otho T. Beall, Jr., *"Aristotle's Master Piece* in America: A Landmark in the Folklore of Medicine," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd Ser., XX (1963), 207-222.

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> great sexual excitement. The consequence is that sexual desire in the male is somewhat diminished, and the act of coition takes place but rarely. And, again, while women are suckling there is usually such a call on the vital force made by the organs secreting milk that sexual desire is almost annihilated. Now, as all that we have read and heard tends to prove that a reciprocity of desire is, to a great extent, necessary to excite the male, we must not be surprised if we learn that excesses in fertile married life are comparatively rare, and that sensual feelings in the man become gradually sobered down.

This is a representative passage of Acton's thinking. In the first sentence one can observe how belief or received opinion is offered in the form of observation, an unadorned instance of "ideology"—that is, of thought which is socially determined yet unconscious of its determination. The second sentence is a good example of the mode of reasoning one can expect to find in writings of this sort. The "consequence" is a consequence of nothing; or rather it is the consequence of fantasy or wish-fulfillment, and the logic of the passage is the logic of intellectual day-dream. It may be paraphrased in the statement that the best way of reducing or extinguishing sexual desire is to keep your wife pregnant. On the other hand, to the extent that this passage represents a genuine belief we cannot discount its source in attitudes or behavior or its reciprocal effect on them. Finally, if one compares the tone and content of such a passage—and of this book in general—with analogous ones in Acton's book on prostitution, it becomes clear that the earlier work is in point of humanity and generosity of feeling superior. And this leads one to suggest that we are confronted here by a disparity which is characteristic of the Victorian period—that during this time the development of social attitudes, of attitudes toward society and social problems, had outstripped the development of personal attitudes, of attitudes toward personal problems or conflicts, and of inwardness in general. Taken as a whole, the Victorian novel—as opposed to Romantic poetry on the one hand and the modern novel on the other—may be regarded as demonstrating a similar inequality.

Some pages further on, Acton recurs to women for the second and last time. He has, he says, "taken pains to obtain and compare

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abundant evidence on this subject," and goes on to epitomize his findings for the reader.

> I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally. It is too true, I admit, as the divorce courts show, that there are some few women who have sexual desires so strong that they surpass those of men. . . . I admit, of course, the existence of sexual excitement terminating even in nymphomania, a form of insanity which those accustomed to visit lunatic asylums must be fully conversant with; but, with these sad exceptions, there can be no doubt that sexual feeling in the female is in the majority of cases in abeyance . . . and even if roused (which in many instances it never can be) is very moderate compared with that of the male. Many men, and particularly young men, form their ideas of women's feelings from what they notice early in life among loose or, at least, low and vulgar women. . . . Any susceptible boy is easily led to believe, whether he is altogether overcome by the syren or not, that she, and therefore all women, must have at least as strong passions as himself. Such women however give a very false idea of the condition of female sexual feeling in general. Association with the loose women of London streets, in casinos, and other immoral haunts (who, if they have not sexual feeling, counterfeit it so well that the novice does not suspect but that it is genuine), all seem to corroborate such an impression, and . . . it is from these erroneous notions that so many young men think that the marital duties they will have to undertake are beyond their exhausted strength, and from this reason dread and avoid marriage. . . . The best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel.
>
> As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions. No nervous or feeble young man need, therefore, be deterred from marriage by any exaggerated notion of the duties required from him. The married woman has no wish to be treated on the footing of a mistress.

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We need not pause to discuss the degree of truth or falsehood in these assertions. What is of more immediate concern is that these assertions indicate a system of beliefs. These beliefs are in the first place associated with class: the "majority of women" evidently fails to include "low and vulgar women"—this final ascription might possibly include all working class females. These beliefs express yet again the notion that sex is a curse and a torture, and that the only hope of salvation for man lies in marriage to a woman who has no sexual desires and who will therefore make no sexual demands on her husband. At this point we can observe how sexual responsibility is being projected onto the role of woman; she is being required to save man from himself; and conversely if she is by some accident endowed with a strongly responsive nature, she will become the agent of her husband's ruin. In either event she is being regarded as essentially a function of masculine needs, whatever the direction in which those needs may run. That these needs are in substance contradictory, that sexuality is a regular hell, and that general impotence is a universal fear, not to say a universal condition, of middle class men is the burden which Acton's book communicates.

We see then how nearly related is the world which Acton creates and the world envisaged by pornography. At all points they touch either by analogy or by analogy through opposition, and sometimes by both at once. In both there is a similar split or divided consciousness; both are dominated by the logic of fantasy and association rather than by the logic of events or of consecutive thought. Both are also worlds without psychology; they are worlds of organs and physiology in which everything is convertible into matter. That is to say both represent a primitive form of materialism. In pornography, this fantasy purports to be subversive and liberating. In Acton's work it represents itself as grimly scientific and ineluctably tragic. What is of largest interest, however, is that at this moment in history a human science—the investigation of sexuality—had attained approximately the same stage of intellectual development as pornography itself. Perhaps it might be more precise to say that it rested or remained fixed at that stage, and it is to the happenings of that enduringly arrested world that we must now begin to turn.

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Alfred Kazin

GEORG LUKÁCS ON EUROPEAN REALISM

Georg Lukács is probably the only Communist philosopher and literary critic in East Europe who still has the power to interest and to teach many readers in the West. This is due entirely to his intellectual gifts and to the systematically moral vision of history that he has retained as a writer despite his many servilities to Stalin and the betrayals of his own intellectual standards that he has in times past committed as a Communist leader. Lukács owes his reputation entirely to the logical skill and intellectual vision with which, as a thinker rather than as a "party intellectual," he has sought to illuminate the deepest aspects of Marxism. He gives the impression that no other Communist philosopher has done for some time—that despite official avowals and mechanical formulas, here is an individual thinker who is fascinated by and thoroughly committed to Marxism as a philosophy, and who uses it for the intellectual pleasure and moral satisfaction that this gives him. Yet unlike the really noble figures in the early days of Communist history like Rosa Luxemburg, and brilliant writers like Leon Trotsky, who were truly revolutionary intellectuals committed to Marxism as a basic philosophy of human liberation, Lukács is actually a more "bourgeois" and academic humanist—who because of his inner detachment can stimulate and provoke us by his insights into a text and his formulations of an aesthetic issue. The Luxemburgs and Trotskys, far more imposing and admirable figures, were as persons so much identified with their thought that they have become the heroes and martyrs of an embattled Weltanschauung. Georg Lukács remains simply useful and pertinent as a critic.

Although Lukács has been called "the finest Marxist since

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Marx,"[1] the brilliance of his best work no more confirms the truth of Marxism as a total philosophy of history than the vindictive attacks on him by the party bosses in Hungary after his return from Russia in 1945 discredit Marxism as a serious philosophy.[2] Marxism, which uniquely among modern philosophies of history *has* proved better at "changing" the world than at "interpreting" it, has become, intellectually, the victim of its political success, and seems to need so many bayonets to hold it up for the instruction of intellectuals and students in Eastern Europe that it is now often rejected as a serious philosophy. Certainly one cannot discuss literary doctrine with Soviet writers without soon being made to feel that "Marxism" in Russia is now just a cover for bureaucratic slogans. But it is exactly because Marxism-Leninism has proved so useless to serious students of literature that Lukács can still be read and valued for his understanding in this book of the great nineteenth-century novelists and for his genuine belief in the value of his philosophy of history to imaginative force in literature. In Russia today, says the unknown Soviet writer who signs himself "Abram Tertz," "Socialist Realism" has never meant a genuine concern with realism itself, which by its very nature is nothing if it is not critical realism, but has been only the bureaucratic doctrine with which the Communist state protects its "sacred" mission against the dangers of criticism. By contrast, the reader of *Studies in European Realism* quickly discovers that Lukács's great enthusiasm as a critic is exactly for "critical" realism in the spirit of Balzac and Tolstoy, the great novelists who adhered to no school of realism, to whom realism in the modern sense of systematic documentation would have been uninteresting, for to them the novel, like great epic and classical drama, still represented the encounter of a superior individual with a society unequal to his sense of possibility, his faith in a higher human destiny. And it is not surprising, in view of Lukács's identification of imaginative force in literature

1. Gyula Borbandi in *East Europe* (November, 1962).
2. See Joseph Revai, *Lukács And Socialist Realism* (London, Fore Publications, 1950). Revai, one of the ruling group of the Hungarian Communist Party before the 1956 revolution, was its "literary commissar," and although by many accounts he was a man of personal cultivation and had been a student of Lukács, his attempt to discredit Lukács in the eyes of students and writers is interesting only because of the contrast that its malice and obvious intellectual dishonesty make with Lukács own writings.

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with the profound criticisms of society made by the great novelists he loves, that he should be antagonistic to Zola and to naturalism generally, and obviously uninterested in most Soviet novelists after Maxim Gorky, himself not a product of Soviet civilization. Lukács's old-fashioned admirations—the only novelists he seems to enjoy after the great masters are Thomas Mann and Maxim Gorky—are a symbol of a taste which has refused to yield anything in artistic matters to the contemporary world, whether communist or capitalist. And in nothing is the essentially individual, if not always independent, spirit of Lukács's literary criticism so clearly revealed as in his unconvincing efforts to praise the mechanical products of "Socialist Realism," in his obvious unconcern with working-class experience itself.

Lukács, like many Marxist intellectuals who speak mechanically of the proletariat and of its "mission" in history, knows nothing at first hand about the working class. He was born (in 1885) the son of a wealthy Hungarian banker ennobled for his financial services to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and in the many works of his Marxist period, which began during the First World War, seems to be fulfilling what a particularly close student of Lukács's career, Mr. Morris Watnick,[3] has conclusively shown to be the "elitist" point of view that marks Lukács's first, philosophically idealist writings on art. Indeed, Lukács's work is particular proof of the way in which the supposedly objective content of Marxism lends itself to his kind of aesthetic humanism. For the spell of Marxism to intellectuals has always consisted in the belief that history has a mission, that one "stage" of society must inevitably develop into another in accordance with laws of inevitable economic and social change that represent progress in man's conquest of his material environment and his eventual liberation from "things"; this will permit him, for the "first" time in history, to be wholly a creative human being, instead of being the exploited, divided and alienated man he is now. And to no one is this vision of man seeking his proper destiny, his true estate as a human being, so likely to be sympathetic as to a sensitive literary and philosophic intellectual who, like Georg Lukács, is able

3. In *Soviet Survey* (London), nos. 23-27, 1958-1959. This is the best documented study of Lukács's life and writings.

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to think of economic exploitation as a hindrance to a man's fulfillment of his expected destiny on earth. The great Marxist thinkers have always been able to interpret complex material problems as metaphors of the necessary stages on life's way. And Lukács, though not directly one of the great figures in the Marxist tradition, nevertheless carries the reader along in his exciting vision of the nineteenth-century novel as a drama of man's most majestic possibilities. He makes the reader feel that Balzac, Stendhal and Tolstoy represent a great age not only in the novel but also in man's attempt to transcend society—that their comprehensive mastery of social truth was one with their artistry, for their criticism of society sprang from their deepest instinct as artists.

The distinction of Lukács's *Studies in European Realism*—despite certain passages of obeisance to the Lenin-Stalin cult and some mechanical flattery of the Russian literary tradition itself (the book was written in Russia during the terrible purges of the 1930's)—is that it brings an essentially philosophic and moral vision of man's necessary destiny to bear on the great age of the novel; the book puts into a new and dramatic focus the sources of realism in the nineteenth century. Lukács's studies in realism bring home to us certain sources of the imaginative power of such towering figures as Balzac and Tolstoy. Lukács is exceptional among students of nineteenth-century realism because he is both a philosopher with great gifts of critical analysis and a critic who can marshal his points with logical rigor. He always writes in the perspective of a philosophical system. He is not, admittedly, the kind of critic that great writers become in discussing the work of their equals in imagination—Balzac greeting Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* or Tolstoy pointing up the weaknesses of Dostoevsky are often partisan and selective in their judgments, but they have a kind of insight that professional and therefore hopefully judicious critics do not share. Indeed, Lukács is too theoretical (and I would say even visionary) a writer to be able to express his judgments with the blend of suppleness and plasticity and irony which makes novelists like Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann such delightful essayists in criticism. On the other hand, Lukács's whole strength as a critic is that he has carried out to the limits, with intellectual passion, the literary scholar's ability to speak for literary tradition, for the tradition of a country, of a language,

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of a specific national culture. For Lukács European realism, the modern literature he loves most in the world, is the highest expression of a continuing ambition of the human spirit that he finds in the great writers of the past. The literary tradition of Europe *is* his intellectual patrimony, his culture, his faith. Apart from writers like Coleridge, Keats and Eliot, who usually write the most original and therefore the most influential criticism, for they are seeking to create a new taste in accordance with the originality of their own artistic demands, the most useful criticism in any generation tends to come from those, like Van Wyck Brooks or F. R. Leavis or Edmund Wilson, who identify themselves with a literary tradition. In the deepest sense such writers are the guardians or conscience of tradition. And where a specialist in one period or another serves us by his specific and technical knowledge, a critic like Lukács shows that the literary tradition of the nineteenth-century novel is not a continuum of writers and works and "schools," but a moral and philosophic tradition with urgent consequences for our own generation.

Lukács's *Studies in European Realism* is a work based on tradition and makes up a study in tradition. Its perspective is different from that of a great creative writer, who probably would not admire Balzac and Tolstoy so absolutely, and from that of a professional literary scholar, who would value more for their own sake the details of literary history. Lukács writes as a good European who venerates the highest achievements of his culture in great works of literature. As a Marxist, Lukács of course wants to show that the best promise of continuing this tradition is the international working-class movement. But quite apart from the fact that Lukács is obviously enthusiastic about the great nineteenth-century novels and not interested in or even encouraging about twentieth-century literature (one of whose major problems, how the individual writer can *be* creative in a collectivist society, Lukács never considers), it must be said that Lukács's very distinction and even his stimulating powers as a critic depend on his profound involvement with the literary tradition of the nineteenth century. A deep and urgent sense of tradition is what makes the good critic. If, like Keats in his letters and Coleridge in his essays, he can put *himself* into this tradition, then he does what Eliot in his famous essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" said that the poet must do—transform the past in the light

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of the present. If, like Lukács, he insists that "society," the socialism that he believes is its last and necessary stage, will carry out the realistic traditions of Western literature, one can certainly question his abstract argument. But though Lukács lacks the creative wit and ease of the great critics, he does write as a humanist with their tradition "in his bones"; he embodies the spiritual and intellectual values of the literature he loves; he can make these values necessary issues to us today.

The great value of Lukács's book—and this despite the sycophancy that shows what it is like to write a book in the repressive atmosphere of Stalin's "Socialism"—is the way in which his deep and earnest sense of literary tradition operates in relation to realism. Though a century now separates us from the great masterpieces of Balzac and Tolstoy, "realism" as a literary idea is still associated with the materialism and vulgarity of our own society. But Lukács, who thinks that writers like Flaubert and Zola did surrender to capitalism (hence their aesthetic weakness of trying to reproduce society literally), values in Balzac and Tolstoy exactly their superiority to contemporary society, which he thinks sprang from their positive and "older" ideals. Speaking of the great passage in the *Iliad* where, as Lessing said, Homer describes the *making* of Achilles's weapons and not just their appearance, Lukács goes on to say—in a passage that expresses better than any other in the book the creative and liberating meaning he gives to realism—"The really great novelists are in this respect always true-born sons of Homer. True, the world of objects and the relationship between them has changed, has become more intricate, less spontaneously poetic. But the art of the great novelists manifests itself precisely in the ability to overcome the unpoetic nature of their world, through sharing and experiencing the life and evolution of the society they lived in. It is by sending out their spontaneously typical heroes to fulfill their inherently necessary destinies that the great writers have mastered with such sovereign power the changeful texture of the external and internal, great and little moments that make up life."

A "typical" hero to Lukács is not a hero like others but one who concentrates in himself all the forces of change at a particular time; as a character he brings certain influences to the point of action and becomes himself a determining influence. This positive

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conception of realism as necessarily in conflict with the acceptance of capitalism as "reality," this conception of the hero as one who brings to dramatic focus the social forces that are embodied in himself and thus opposes them, explains why Lukács's book has meaning for those who, like himself, think of the novel as carrying on the epic and dramatic tradition of Western literature. Lukács is always critical of naturalism, for he feels that with the eclipse of revolutionary faith among intellectuals after 1848, pessimism and resignation became the order of the day and deprived even the most gifted writers of the necessary weapons against society. For Lukács it is the dynamic opposition of the human spirit to a given social order, as shown by the gigantic figures of Balzac, who despise a society they feel to be unworthy of their creative power, that makes "true" realism so bracing and exciting. And although, as a good Communist, he evades the vital point in this book and in his writings on contemporary writers,[4] it is obvious that Lukács's admiration for "true" realism, by which he means the example of Balzac, is not likely to extend to the "positive" hero of "Socialist" realism. In Soviet literature, not only is "realism" prescribed for all writers as if it were an offense against one's neighbors to write in any other literary spirit, but the "positive" hero is usually a cipher, a slogan in human form, and is valued as "typical" only in the sense that he is average. For Lukács the "typical" means the concentration of all the forces already moving to social change; for Soviet literature, it means the common. The essence of Lukács's admiration for realism is that it produced the heroes of Balzac and Tolstoy—men who are exceptional not because they are isolated, like the heroes of romantic literature, but because all that is seething in the social conflicts of their time has come to dramatic consciousness. To Lukács, indeed, the heroes of Balzac and Tolstoy are made heroic through their more resolute and heroic consciousness; they are heroes in the grand authoritative style of the nineteenth century. Like Balzac and Tolstoy, and of course like Marx above all, these heroes make themselves forces equal to the force of the society they resist and seek to transform. For Lukács, the hero of a literary work must in some sense be equal to the achievement of a new society; the individual, though in his social

4. See *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London, 1962).

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character "determined" by society, must as an individual have the curious view and larger vision that lead to a new society. The creative tension of this resolution and opposition is what makes literature dramatic to Lukács—and what makes realism the favorable ground of this drama is the resolute marshalling of social detail which is the modern version of what Hegel valued so much in classical epic—the "totality of objects" it brings into play.

Yet even if we accept Lukács's conception of realism as essentially a struggle between a superior individual and a society that he must master, not escape, it is hard to approve his marginal treatment of Stendhal (who is discussed in the context of Balzac) and his relative indifference to Dostoevsky and Dickens. Of course the book is a collection of essays and not a systematic study of realism; these studies are certainly very selective. Balzac, whom Marx and Engels admired above all other modern writers, is a passion of Lukács's, but he is also a curiously safe subject for a Communist critic to write about, since he was a royalist and Catholic who cannot be accused, as liberal and radical writers are, of "betraying" the cause that Communists believe is in their keeping. Tolstoy in Russia as elsewhere is unambiguously a classic, and Lenin thought very highly of him and was able to "explain" the social source of his magnificent creative power—which turns out to be the Russian peasantry. But Lukács is not inspired to the same enthusiastic flights of critical analysis by Stendhal, Dickens and Dostoevsky—they are not comfortable subjects for a Marxist critic to handle. Yet he has space in this book for a chapter on the Russian nineteenth-century critics Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, who were less complicatedly concerned with realism than were Stendhal and Dickens, and for a chapter on Gorky, who in Stalinist days became (it was not entirely his fault), the figurehead of a "great" novelist.

This prizing of certain authors and books for their "tendency" only, and the automatic disparagement of valuable books because they do not clearly show the "right" tendency, is the besetting weakness of even the most intelligent Marxist critics. It follows from the habit of thinking in social categories; one sees in the weaker chapters of Lukács's book the fact that he, who responds to the classics with so much emotion, is not always aware of having substituted "progress" for excellence as the prime categories in his inner consciousness as a

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critic. Of course no critic is ever passive enough in his taste to be able to read a work of literature wholly for its workmanship. A book is a formal composition, but it is composed on the basis of certain ideas, and inevitably it leaves certain ideas in the mind as the effect of the literary experience. And the strength of this book, the chapters on Balzac and Tolstoy, is so clearly related to what these great writers represent of heroism and genius to Lukács's mind, that one can criticize the exaggerated emphasis he gives to the work of Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky, not his concern with the social setting or his belief in criticism as a social instrument.

Yet this said, it has to be admitted that Lukács, like almost all Marxist critics, has not found the satisfying balance between his admiration for the achievement of certain writers and his evaluation of what writers represent in society that one does find in the comments on literature of Marx and Trotsky—the only two writers in this tradition whose judgments of literature seem to be entirely "free," and which are stimulating to writers themselves. In Marx and Trotsky literature is a kingdom of power related to social power but not identical with it. Lukács does not have their proud and easy capacity for judgment. By comparison with them he suffers, for brilliant as he is on his favorite, Balzac, the system of values by which he operates never gives space to autonomous aesthetic achievement: Balzac is not just the greatest modern novelist, but he is the greatest *of a certain type*. And Lukács, in the last analysis, will never take a chance on a writer who is of the wrong type, or on a writer who strays from being the right type. He does love the type more than he loves the individual—which does not mean that he is lacking in taste or in the capacity for making sustained and valuable analyses of the great books he loves. It is simply that his approach to literature is finally not to the work but to the scholarly and philosophical and perhaps "revolutionary" example that it serves.

You can see this lack of directness in the very awkwardness of Lukács's style, which can be associated with the fact that he emphasizes formulations about the nature of a school or style rather than insights into a particular style starting from a direct concern with the text. But the kind of direct aesthetic criticism that we value is usually written only by a handful of people in any generation—the primary figures in the creation of literature. Much of what passes

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for "aesthetic" criticism today is derivative and repetitive and has nothing of the aesthetic in its spirit or teaching. Criticism is interesting, after all, only to the extent that it is valuable, and much of what is published today is less pertinent than literary scholarship or the historical consciousness of those who guard a literary tradition. Lukács's book is imperfect as a study of realism and obviously incomplete. Yet it is a tribute to him and to what is creative and enduring in Marxism as a philosophy that his book, with all its faults and expediencies, should suggest so much of the vitality and enduring hope in the great novelists whom he loves.

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Frank Kermode

TRADITION AND THE NEW ART:
INTERVIEWS WITH HAROLD ROSENBERG AND ERNST GOMBRICH

When I was an undergraduate—let's say a generation ago—and for some time after that, literary people talked a lot about tradition. For one thing, T. S. Eliot had written about it and made it seem important. His essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was a classic. The word "tradition" wasn't at all a mere piece of conversational small change, but a precise and indispensable critical term. It kept its bright ring through the Marxist thirties, even for people who had small interest in the extension of the idea into religious and sociological fields which at this time occupied the interest of Mr. Eliot himself.

I think that even now, when the whole idea has been quite fully criticized from the historical and other points of view, Mr. Eliot's tradition doctrines retain a good deal of their authority. Of course they still haven't had much success outside the arts. This is something of a problem, in fact, because Eliot's teaching on tradition is really all of a piece. The past makes sense, he says, only on a Christian view of it. If Eliot calls tradition "a continuity of habit and custom in people of the same blood, living in the same place," if he's right, then it's certainly lost. As he sees it, tradition depends on social immobility and an acceptance of the principle of subordination. On the Eliot view, you can point to specific moments in history where the rot set in. And the psychological consequences come out in the arts of later periods as the blight of what he calls "dissociated sensibility"—an inability to think and feel simultaneously.

Editors' note: These conversations are the first of a series of informal interviews around these central themes: The Breach with the Past, The Use of the Past, Ceremonial Survival and the Body of Knowledge, Tradition and Society. We have kept the spontaneous and conversational syntax to indicate that none of the statements by any of the participants had been planned or rehearsed.

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In restating these familiar positions in a much too cursory way, I'm simply trying to define my starting point. Of course Mr. Eliot's central tenets have been modified and adapted by other people—in America, for instance, Allen Tate and others produced a Southern version of them. The point is that if such opinions have any substance there aren't many people who can now think straight about the past. To be subordinate, immobile, content with ancestral habit—that's not a program to command popular support. The new will usually seem more interesting than the old—or, to use language acceptable to an anthropologist, we in our time have more to do with *schism* than with *continuity*. A state of affairs in which a particularly "fissile" society tries to assert its common values by ritual celebrations of *continuity* is not unknown to anthropologists, and one way out of my difficulty might be to argue that authoritarian and ritualistic assertions by poets are in fact an instance of our society's doing this. But for the moment anyway, I think we have to avoid such grand solutions. The question then remains: are we devoted to schism? Do we value continuity less than we did?

History is alarming. Everybody, or almost everybody, feels better for finding intelligible patterns in it. This is the best way of accounting for the success of historical theories of "dissociation," even among people who attach no particular importance to other concepts of Mr. Eliot such as "christendom," or the traditional "organic society." Hence the continued authority of Mr. Eliot's doctrines. Yet it is a matter of record that notions of this kind have flourished at exactly the same time, and under the same conditions, as other opinions so different as to be antithetical. On the one hand such modernists as Mr. Eliot require that certain aspects of history should be, as it were, reduced to second-class status, thought of as deviant; on the other hand, a more radical convention pretty well rejects the past altogether.

Futurism was one instance of this, though there are many others. There doesn't seem to be a useful generic term, so we must rather awkwardly call this modern rejection of the past: *anti-passéisme*. I don't mean that it's only modern, but that there is a characteristically modern variety of it. Painting I think provides the best examples. Sometimes this *anti-passéisme* merges with a more traditional primitivism, as perhaps in Paul Klee. But there is without doubt a more extreme form of *anti-passéisme* in the modern world, and not only in modern painting. So you can say that the only sense in which the past is relevant to your painting is the very personal one—you enact your own past as you paint. Or, in a novel, you can disown the entire literary past and claim affinity not with past novels but with the descriptive and analytic sci-

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ences—anthropology, biochemistry, to use the instances provided by William Burroughs for *The Naked Lunch*. This book (we are told by an admirer) "has no use for history," which is all *ancient* history—"sloughed off skin . . . a mere wrinkling or furrowing of the surface" of the world.

Broadly speaking, then, we are dealing with two attitudes to tradition that are now found acceptable. One desires continuity and laments its absence. The other desires, and tries to put into practice, the clean break with the past: it is an abolitionist view. There is too much past, it says, and its relevance is dubious or non-existent: ignore it.

This abolitionist line is virtually a glorification of what the traditionalists call heresy or schism. It isn't, as I say, entirely new; probably it has its intellectual roots in the same ancient millennialism as its opponent. But it has a new intensity. Many revolutions, political and literary, and indeed religious, have claimed to be purging institutions that have grown corrupt, and have venerated an ancient heroic purity—have made it a model. This is where the new abolitionism does seem different. It may not be possible to achieve historical discontinuity; but that is what seems to be intended.

And this clean break with the past, myth or no, extends beyond the arts. For instance, through popular versions of modern existentialism, into ethics. It seems to be strongly felt that the past offers to the new world much less guidance than to earlier generations. And such feelings can be dressed in powerful arguments, as when Marshall McLuhan tries to show that cultures are determined by technologies, and that we are now at the end of a cultural phase which used typography as its model, and at the beginning of a new "electric" culture.

And yet, of course, it's a matter of common sense that the forces of continuity are very strong beyond the power of individual acts of will to break them. Institutions survive—"the strong shadows of the past on the present." Ceremonies survive, emblems of historical moments which may or may not have an obvious meaning in the modern world. In the arts, abolition is not simple. You can of course destroy a painting, but you can't assimilate it and put it behind you as a biochemist or physicist uses some important paper. So long as the painting exists it makes demands upon sensibility and judgment: it is a problem never obsolete. So—since it's not yet the practice to thin out the past by calculated acts of destruction—the past grows constantly bigger. In our world it also grows steadily more available. If it's true that everybody makes his own past, then pasts also grow steadily more *numerous*. That's

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perhaps why the past has been called a monstrous burden, a nightmare from which one tries to awake.

I've been outlining two ways of dealing with the burden or the nightmare. One of these invents myths of tradition, patterns which explain the past as, say St. Augustine or Dante or Mr. Eliot, explains it. The other simply dismisses the past as meaningless. In a sense both are myths. But myths can be important in the realm of action. To find patterns in history, and even to find that you can make a clean break with the past, you assume a degree of certainty about what has happened which will allow you subsequently to predict what *will* happen. Now we're told by Karl Popper that the possibility of such prediction doesn't logically exist, since new knowledge is indeterminable. And there is also something Popper calls the "Oedipus effect"—the prediction itself affects the course of events. For instance, this myth of the clean break will itself affect the future not by being true but by being *believed.*

It's in the arts, of course, and especially in painting, that the issues are most persistently in view. Here the program for reshaping or rejecting the past is most often outlined and implemented. So we start with painting—indeed, with the author of a book called *The Tradition of the New,* which is evidently a title that reflects some of our concerns. Harold Rosenberg, the principle apologist of American action painting, will be followed by Ernst Gombrich, an art historian who has very different views, as readers of his book, *Art and Illusion,* will know. Over the door of the Warburg Institute is written the single word MNEMOSYNE—the Institute exists for the study of continuities, in art and science, magic and ritual. Between such a view of the past as that of the Director of the Warburg Institute and Rosenberg's there's sure to be conflict.

Now for Harold Rosenberg.

ROSENBERG: The tradition of the new does not relate solely to action painting but, as far as action painting is concerned, I do not see it as the product of a mind that has no content of the past. What I had in mind was that it's a way of evoking the past through a total concentration on the act of doing.

KERMODE: What is the nature of the past that's so evoked?

ROSENBERG: It's the past experience of the painting of the particular artist. The art historian has what you might call an objective past in which works are related to one another. Now neither the modern painter nor the spectator has a relation to the art of the past that in any way conforms to that of the historian. Their relation to the past

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is full of gaps. Not only is it full of gaps in terms of knowledge; what's more important, it's full of gaps in terms of emotional response. Edgar Allen Poe talks about the impossibility of responding to *Paradise Lost* simply because of its length. If you use that as a metaphor for the history of painting and sculpture it's obvious that no individual can respond emotionally to the whole thing. What the artist is doing in action painting is attempting to appropriate that part of the painting of the past that is alive for him and very often he doesn't quite know what that painting is that's alive until he has painted his own picture. In other words a transaction is created which is a form of self-illumination of the artist about art.

KERMODE: But this in itself doesn't make him very much different from any other painter: I mean is there something that distinguishes action painting from other. . .

ROSENBERG: I would say this: that the crisis as we call it—the term was used by Mallarmé too—that is, the crisis of art experienced in America about the beginning of the war and during the forties reached a pitch which made it practically impossible for anyone to paint at all, and this was something new. Action painting arose out of a specific situation that existed in a particular state of tension in the United States and particularly in New York. It had a great deal to do with the thirties; that is, it was reaction against the political art which had swept over the New York art world during the depression and during the government programs in art of the New Deal.

KERMODE: But that was in a way an interlude wasn't it?

ROSENBERG: It looks like an interlude now but at the time it appeared as the future and it took a great deal for artists to tear themselves away from the image of the future which would be governed by social realist—as it was called—painting. In other words it was necessary for each individual artist to break with what he had perhaps considered to be a philosophy of life in order to make painting itself into a philosophy of life. This in itself is quite a crisis when one is compelled to make an activity like painting become a substitute for almost any other concept of value.

KERMODE: But the newness of action painting is not merely in its rejection of this historicism. It's a bit more than that.

ROSENBERG: Oh yes, yes.

KERMODE: You speak in fact of the moment when representation gives way to enactment as a critical moment. I wonder, do you see this as a revolution in the sense of the Copernican revolution?

ROSENBERG: There was an article in *The Texas Quarterly* in which

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a philosopher presented exactly that point of view, that action painting was the art of the next four or five hundred years—though I don't know whether it is or not.

KERMODE: Can you see a kind of painting which belongs in the future—which stems from action painting yet all the same gives up some of the aesthetic presumptions of action painting?

ROSENBERG: If I understand you correctly, you're saying is there possibly an idea here which is susceptible of further development in all sorts of unpredictable directions?

KERMODE: Yes.

ROSENBERG: If that's the question, I would certainly say yes. I do feel that action painting is very deeply related to the situation of the individual in the contemporary world—a situation in which every profession, you might say, finds its practitioners using it to identify themselves as human beings; this is, of course, a very deep cultural problem.

KERMODE: What would a theologian or a lawyer have to say about his discipline if you told him that it was to be subject to a similar or an analagous revolution?

ROSENBERG: Well, I doubt if a comparison could be made since law and theology are both essentially conservative disciplines, rather than formative investigations of experience.

KERMODE: But do you think that the tradition of the new has no application to historiography, to law and other subjects of that kind? In other words, is art here in an intellectual vacuum?

ROSENBERG: No, I don't think so. I think it has application to experience of mankind in all fields but it's most obvious in politics. I mean the attempt of the artist to formulate himself through his art. As de Kooning said some time ago—I think I have the exact quotation here—"Painting is a way of living. That is where its form lies." Now if painting is to derive its form from the artist's way of living. . .

KERMODE: Yes—but wouldn't this apply—

ROSENBERG: What's that?

KERMODE: What about poetry, for instance?

ROSENBERG: I think that has been said about poetry probably before anyone ever said it about painting.

KERMODE: What I'm trying to get at is that this modern crisis is really a crisis in our consciousness of history, the way we use history. Does this apply only to the arts or has it a more general application?

ROSENBERG: My answer is it has a much more general aspect. In fact, I have written in *The Tradition of the New* about the split in all professions in relation to their mere practice as a profession and the at-

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tempt to use those professions to establish a way of life or a concept of life. In other words, professions are tending toward philosophy in almost every case where they're broad enough to make such a pretense.

KERMODE: Now, you've made a sharp distinction in your book between European avant-gardism and American radical attitudes to art.

ROSENBERG: Yes. As a matter of fact a similar one was made years ago by D. H. Lawrence between the avant-gardism of the European and the kind of new life of the American. I don't agree with everything that he said but he has touched on that subject and I think very beautifully and deeply.

KERMODE: Yes. But on the whole you would claim that your position has more relevance to American civilization than to European, would you?

ROSENBERG: No, because some of our experiences may be of universal character. In fact in my opinion that's the reason why action painting has become an international form in art—particularly in countries that are undergoing rapid and extreme changes like Japan—the individual has to put himself into the world with almost nothing but what he has gathered himself. That does not mean he has become a primitive but it does mean that his education is in his own hands.

KERMODE: Is there any way in which you can foresee a kind of art which looks back over action painting as if it had never happened?

ROSENBERG: That's going on right now. We have various kinds of what I call commodity art that aim to restore the illusionistic principle which Professor Gombrich feels is the essence of art.*

*I had no knowledge of Mr. Rosenberg's remark at the time I was interviewed by Professor Kermode, and I therefore had no opportunity or possibility of replying to his interpretation of my views. I have therefore asked the editors to give me this opportunity, without which it would appear that I accept his misreading of my work.

I have written in *Art and Illusion, page* 7:—

"When we deal with masters of the past who were both great artists and great "illusionists," the study of art and the study of illusion cannot always be kept apart. I am all the more anxious to emphasize as explicitly as I possibly can that this book is not intended as a plea, disguised or otherwise, for the exercise of illusionist tricks in painting today. I should like to prevent this particular breakdown of communication between myself and my readers and critics because I am, in fact, rather critical of certain theories of nonfigurative art and have alluded to some of these issues where they seemed relevant. But to chase this hare would be to miss the point of the book. That the discoveries and effects of representation which were the pride of earlier artists have become trivial to-

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KERMODE: Thank you very much.

Next I spoke with Ernst Gombrich of the Warburg Institute.

KERMODE: Professor Gombrich, does the expression "anti-art" mean anything at all?

GOMBRICH: Well of course it means something. I think the people who use it have a certain image or idea of what the word art stands for, in our society. They think of uplift and philistinism and all these things, and they think that they are against it.

KERMODE: But when they suppose that their art is—as it's been put—cleansed of the past, is that a conception that you could entertain in painting?

GOMBRICH: No, of course I couldn't. Because by using the term anti-art they show that they are related to something, even if only in opposition. By using the very words they show that they are part of tradition and naturally in every tradition there are things which are gradually being discarded, but the continuity isn't therefore broken. The main carrier of tradition is surely the language and a child who grows up in a culture gradually absorbs something of that culture. In language, as many linguists have shown, are embodied a very great number of concepts and notions which we take for granted.

KERMODE: This professed dislike of the past is characteristic, perhaps, of this century, is it?

day I would not deny for a moment."

I have once more drawn attention to this passage in the preface to the second edition. What else can I do? Should I point to the discussions on communication and expression and on physiognomic perception now reprinted in my volume, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse?* Or will it help if I say that I have also explicitly denied that it makes sense to speak of "the essence of art," and that I happen to be aware of the existence of architecture, music and poetry? I should have thought it was in the interest of the speaker's reputation as a fair polemicist that he should have withdrawn or qualified his statement above, about what I feel to be "the essence of art," but he has unfortunately refused to do so.

E. H. Gombrich

Professor Gombrich has chosen to pick up a remark made in an informal discussion. In New York art circles "illusionistic" and "representational" are often used synonymously. Looseness of this kind should, of course, be avoided. However, there is a line of thought in *Art and Illusion* which seems to me to justify my statement that for Gombrich, "the illusionistic principle is the essence of art."

One of the chief points of *Art and Illusion* is that art cannot copy nature but produces "equivalents" of it. Thus Gombrich puts heavy emphasis on the fact that Constable, the "realist," bowed to existing "schema" for painting trees

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GOMBRICH: Well, wasn't there a Chinese emperor who wanted to burn all books, and did in fact? I think it has often happened—a number of millennial movements and others have tried to discard everything of the past. It is a kind of radicalism and extremism which to me looks a little adolescent and a little irresponsible, but which certainly isn't as new as it would seem. There's a terrible letter by the German romantic painter, Philippe Otto Runge, of 1801, where he says that he dreams of a war which would exterminate everything. And that is the painter's dream because then he could start from scratch. I think romanticism has brought a new kind of ambivalence towards the past. On the one hand, of course, exaggerated nostalgia and on the other hand this extreme awareness of the passage of time and of history which is in Hegel's philosophy and many other romantic ideas, and which I think have almost eaten up our enjoyment of the present in art and in other things. I would say that Hegel's ideas penetrated very much into art criticism.

KERMODE: And would you apply this, too, to the notion that technologies are cultural determinants, that as our ideas on space have changed—we must expect to have a different complex of cultural relationships?

GOMBRICH: I think that this idea about the changing idea of space or

and clouds. "All artistic discoveries," he says, "are discoveries not of likenesses but of equivalents." In regard to modern art, this opinion runs into trouble. To what is a Mondrian "equivalent"? Gombrich chooses "Broadway Boogie Woogie" to argue that it is equivalent to sound—a conclusion which we need not characterize here. At any rate, we have the "equivalents," which means that there must be something "out there" for them to be equivalent to. No equivalents, no art. In deploring what he calls the "struggle against the schema" in the art of the past 100 years, Gombrich generously concedes that "some artists—e.g., Degas—always kept their heads." To Gombrich, no real issue can exist in the artists' struggle for a new relation to reality: if they stop using inherited schema to "make" artistic doubles of things, art simply ceases to exist. Thus the efforts of contemporary painting are, on the one hand, futile, on the other, anti-artistic. Speaking of Action Painting, Gombrich writes, "If this game has a function in our society, it may be that it helps us to 'humanize' the intricate and ugly shapes with which industrial civilization surrounds us. We can learn to see twisted wire or complex machinery as the product of human action. We are trained in a new visual classification. The deserts of city and factory have turned into tanglewoods. Making results in matching." Of course, strictly speaking, an "equivalent" does not have to create an illusion of the thing it equals. Yet a reader of *Art and Illusion* would be justified in interpreting Gombrich's "matching" and turning deserts into tanglewoods as an "illusionistic principle." That is its underlying concept, and one is not compelled to read Gombrich according to the latter's instructions.

Harold Rosenberg

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changing notions of space, which has also been very much discussed in the history of art, is often taken to a length in which it is really contrary to common sense. In a certain sense, of course, as Kant has shown, we can't think without space. In fact, how should we? We can't think of a matchbox which isn't in space. And we can't think of three points which are not somehow related in space. Therefore the idea that there are different types of space is, I think, in a sense a misunderstanding of Kant's idea that space is a type of thought which particularly in Spengler's apocalyptic philosophies go to ludicrous lengths.

But I don't doubt that these people mean something, though what they say is of course perfect nonsense, isn't it? I mean distance can't be abolished either in art or in reality. I fear that this type of talk often makes art criticism and talk about art contemptible to scientists, and not quite without reasons.

I think it is really partly based on a misunderstanding—the misunderstanding that there is something peculiar in space perception which changes with time, and that there is something peculiar in the mode of vision which changes with time because man is supposed to change with various ages. This is precisely what Popper has termed historicism and is really the idea I do not hold. In other words, I do believe that looking into a mirror a cat, or any person from any culture would have roughly the same percept. Therefore I do not think that it is very fruitful to talk of different forms of perceptions of space, because anybody reaching out for that matchbox would have to go through exactly the same movements.

KERMODE: Yes. But Popper's refutation of historicism is an extremely precise, logical exercise, and even intellectuals remain habitually historicists in their attitudes, one feels—it's a very difficult thing not to be. . .

GOMBRICH: Yes, I quite agree because obviously there are lots of things in different ages which are fundamentally very different indeed.

KERMODE: Yes. And out of these rooted misunderstandings all sorts of interesting things tend to develop. If someone like Popper, some highly critical intellect, had been able to tell people in the late sixteenth century that they were really wrong about Greek music, for instance, it would have made a difference to the future of European music, wouldn't it? If he could have convinced them of this.

GOMBRICH: Yes, of course. You mean that there are a lot of very fruitful myths which are myths, and nevertheless have their very interesting reflections in art.

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KERMODE: Well, then I wonder if you regard it as a possibility, that in other sciences, in other arts, there might be a kind of Copernican revolution based upon this myth?

GOMBRICH: That is possible. On the other hand I think it is probably not all that difficult to understand why action painters act as they do—they see the world in a rather simple black and white way. If I understand it rightly, and I did talk to action painters about it, they think that our civilization is soulless, mechanical, completely lacking in spontaneity and they therefore value spontaneity all the more. I think that is a very valuable point of view and the only criticism I have is if they happen to talk nonsense.

KERMODE: There has been in the past a sense in which there were analogous assumptions governing all sorts of different intellectual activities, but when we hear that these action paintings have a confessional quality which reveals a man's psychic conflict or tension, one of the first things that strikes us is that this doesn't seem to be in any way analogous to other kinds of human activity, that a lawyer or a scientist, for example, hardly belongs to the same world as the action painter.

GOMBRICH: Well, of course, they want to be outside this world. But I'm not even quite sure that they succeed in that respect. I think there are a number of links between the talk of the action painters and the talk of the existentialists. I am not very well versed in these things, but the very idea that every decision has to be made spontaneously and cannot be based on anything outside has a good deal of kinship with the idea of the action painters, hasn't it?

KERMODE: But what they're trying to do is essentially confessional.

GOMBRICH: You speak of confessional but frankly I don't quite know what it is supposed to mean. If I make a confession, I have to make it in words, or in any other forms of signs which I know that a Father Confessor, or whoever he is, will understand, because the essence of the confession is, after all, that I communicate something which I have on my mind. The idea that the action painter or any other painter communicates what is in his mind seems to me very questionable. I think that you feel some kind of excitement or tenseness, and that in the context of the jargon of our time you can say that they are striving for spontaneity or a feeling of anxiety, but all these are after all very vague terms and surely no real confession of any kind.

KERMODE: But isn't there behind this a view which is in itself not a new one, that human gesture is extraordinarily revealing, that in fact it says what words can't say about the condition of a man's mind?

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GOMBRICH: Well, human gesture is revealing if you know even the traditions or the vocabulary of the gesture. If you film a Neapolitan trying to sell a fountain pen and splice it into a film where somebody is supposed to plead for his life, you may think that the Neapolitan trying to sell the fountain pen is pleading for his life. I believe in the possibility of graphology provided that you know roughly the standard forms of letters. If you don't, I think it's quite clearly impossible.

Well, in these first interviews we've discussed mainly tradition and the visual arts. They probably represent the most acute and most vivid aspect of the problem. My own view, I think, is closer to Gombrich's than to Rosenberg's. I myself doubt if substantial newness is to be had more easily by us than, by say, Wordsworth or Mallarmé. Rosenberg seems to feel that we have a crisis on: Gombrich is sceptical about it. But *something,* it must be admitted, is on—even if it's only a myth of crisis.

The next interviews will begin at this point—crisis and the need for radical change. And I want to go on to some of the questions this raises in the other arts, especially in poetry and music.

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ARGUMENTS

MORE ON EICHMANN

MARIE SYRKIN

SIRS:

Though Miss McCarthy has injected an unrefreshing note into the by now tiresome controversy about Hannah Arendt's book, her frankness merits an equal candor in reply. Miss McCarthy notes that the hostile critics of *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* with few exceptions, are Jews, while its champions, again with a few exceptions dismissed by Miss McCarthy as "special cases," are Gentiles. Miss McCarthy's "Gentile friends and relations" were startled by the Jewish reaction: "It is as if *Eichmann in Jerusalem* had required a special pair of Jewish spectacles to make its 'true purport' visible."

Till Miss McCarthy's sally into the field the reason for this difference seemed fairly obvious. Jewish reviewers were for the most part specialists in the areas discussed by Miss Arendt and able to challenge those errors in fact on which interpretation depended. The unfriendly Gentile critics whom Miss McCarthy darkly designates—Judge Musmanno, participant in the Nuremberg Trials, Trevor-Roper, historian of the Nazi era, and Richard Crossman, "who winters in Tiberias," have one thing in common: a particular competence in the subjects covered. The division would appear to be between the adequately informed, among whom Jews naturally predominate, and the uninformed, neither intellectually nor emotionally involved in the questions under debate.

Miss McCarthy suggests that the wounds of the deeply involved may be too raw for dispassionate judgment. But a paradoxical feature of the discussion indicates that it is precisely the "propagandists" (among whom Miss McCarthy kindly includes me) who have drawn up a formidable dossier of objective material all relevant to Miss Arendt's theses, while it is her champions who indulge in gross *ad hominem* arguments and make no pretense of offering a serious rebuttal to the large body of factual evidence given.

A prime example of this intellectual irresponsibility on the part of Miss Arendt's defenders is to be found in Miss McCarthy's article. She

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writes: "Miss Arendt's other famous sentence, that without the cooperation of the Jewish Councils four and a half to six million Jews would not have perished seems to me almost self-evidently true." Since this is indeed the crucial sentence, one might have assumed that Miss McCarthy would have troubled to check the text. Miss Arendt actually wrote: "But the whole truth was that there existed Jewish community organizations and Jewish party and welfare associations on both the local and international level. Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and these leaders, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between five and six million."

Even without a pair of Jewish spectacles the difference between Miss McCarthy's paraphrase and the text is apparent. Miss McCarthy confines the charge of Jewish guilt to the Jewish Councils (whose ambiguous role had been discussed by Jewish historians of the period long before Miss Arendt) whereas Miss Arendt accuses the Jewish people in its totality, in every part of the world, of complicity in the holocaust. Is Miss McCarthy really surprised that those familiar with the heroic efforts of Jews in Palestine and America to save European Jews through illegal immigration, ransom, negotiation and organized resistance should be outraged? I shall make no attempt to reargue the case here; I merely suggest that Miss McCarthy try to understand what the "hue and cry" is about.

When she writes specifically of the Jewish Councils, Miss McCarthy declares categorically: "And where the terror ruled—in the camps, prisons, and ghettoes—Miss Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* does not propose that anyone could have done anything but obey." Where on earth does Miss McCarthy suppose that the Jewish Councils functioned? Miss Arendt's strictures fall most heavily on the Jewish Councils in the Polish ghettoes; nor does she exclude the Jewish Council in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt from her list of the culpable. And yet Miss McCarthy assures us that she read the book twice.

What is one to make of this myopia? The most charitable interpretation of lapses such as Miss McCarthy's and of the confusion among her "Gentile friends and relations" is ignorance of the events recorded by Miss Arendt and a consequent inability to appreciate the implications of the text no matter how explicit.

But Miss McCarthy does not let it go at that. She tells us that she found Miss Arendt's account of the extermination of six million Jews

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"morally exhilarating" and that she heard in it "heavenly music, like that of the final chorus of Figaro or the Messiah," because of the "happy endings," the episodes in which a few Jews were saved. Miss McCarthy's acoustics are, to say the least, remarkable. She would probably suggest that a special Gentile hearing aid is required for the reception of these higher registers. Jews are too deafened by the cries of a million shot and gassed children to appreciate the full angelic orchestration enjoyed by Miss McCarthy. She explains Jewish failure in sensibility in this fashion: the Jews "reject the idea that their sufferings made sense, had a plot and a lesson. For me, however, the plot and the lesson were a godsend."

I can understand what Miss McCarthy means by "lesson"—each to his pedagogy! But the suggestion that the extermination "made sense" and that the "plot" as well as the "lesson" was a "godsend" is another matter. Miss McCarthy is too acute not to know what she has written. I admit that I recoil from analyzing this horrifying sentence. Nor do I believe that only Jews reject the idea that their martyrdom "made sense." Gentiles may be charged with ignorance or indifference but few dwell in the icy aesthetic realm indicated by Miss McCarthy. Only to the Nazis did Jewish suffering make sense.

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HAROLD WEISBERG

SIRS:

One is tempted to dismiss Mary McCarthy's "Hue and Cry" as an exercise in indignation bordering on temper tantrum. But this would permit some of the most outrageous writing on any side of the Arendt controversy to stand unchallenged. Indignation, no doubt, does account for the irresponsibility of much of Miss McCarthy's piece but it cannot excuse the abuse she heaps on Miss Arendt's critics nor justify the introduction of snide comparisons of Jews and Gentiles and crude generalizations about Jews and their values in an article proclaiming the superiority of Christian ethics.

Miss McCarthy is so wholly lacking in charity and almost as much in logic that she will not permit an honest disagreement with Miss Arendt. The critic is either a propagandist (Abel and Syrkin), has a vested interest (Trevor-Roper), is brainwashed by climate (Crossman), or is just maliciously engaged in promoting a hate and slander campaign (every Jew except a few kosher pro-Arendt ones). Nor can you dispute Miss McCarthy's remarks about Jews and Jewish attitudes without inviting her charge that you have dragged in the red herring of anti-Semitism ("Second because I am a Gentile and fear that this fact will only rejoice her enemies, since are not all Gentiles anti-Semitic?") Every critic of Miss Arendt, on this account, is tainted and there are no conditions under which a critic, especially a Jewish critic, can be above reproach. Only those who agree with Miss Arendt indicate by their agreement that they are unbiased seekers of truth.

But it is a very substantial agreement that Miss McCarthy demands, for she is also quite critical of "moderate parlor critics." They are guilty of a failure to defend Miss Arendt against slander and perversely prefer to attack her for her criticism of the leadership of the *Judenräte*. Miss McCarthy is astonished by such a false sense of values. Miss Arendt is alive, she reminds us, and can be hurt by slander while the leaders of the *Judenräte* are quite dead and beyond pain. This is a curious attitude. One would think that the living have an opportunity to defend themselves and enlist the support of others while the dead obviously do not. (Miss Arendt certainly is not without defenders, nor is she incapable of defending herself.) But leaving aside Miss McCarthy's somewhat literal-minded approach to the effects of slander, what about the charge itself? Is there a hate and slander campaign against Miss Arendt and if so, is it peculiarly Jewish as Miss McCarthy alleges? This is diffi-

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cult to answer because Miss McCarthy is so promiscuous in her use of "slander." Not only is honest criticism of Miss Arendt impossible but almost any criticism becomes a form of slander and a confirming instance of the hate and slander campaign. So once again there can be no grounds for honest disagreement. We are given no criteria to distinguish criticism from slander and, significantly, Miss McCarthy makes no attempt to establish the correct use of "slander" in the way she so carefully goes about clarifying "monster" for Mr. Abel.

Miss McCarthy believes there is a peculiarly Jewish hate and slander campaign against Miss Arendt carried out in parlor and print. It is peculiarly Jewish because with the exception of a few tainted non-Jews, Gentiles don't find Miss Arendt's book offensive. Only Jews do. Why? Could it be that Jews are hyper-sensitive about the Hitler period? Do they take a simplistic view of the Holocaust and believe that all Jews were martyrs? Perhaps, but what appears to be the main reason for Jewish dissatisfaction with Miss Arendt's book is simply that the Jews are not Gentiles. They don't have the proper Christian moral attitudes. If they did there wouldn't be such a hue and cry. A Christian can see the book in true perspective; a Jew, deficient in Christian virtues, cannot. As for Miss Arendt, she is really a nice Jewish girl with Christian virtues. After all, doesn't she take pity on Eichmann?

As Miss McCarthy exposes the "campaign" against Miss Arendt she appears to accept some of the most banal and stereotyped views of Jews and Judaism. She constantly writes of the attitudes of Jews towards Miss Arendt as if all Jews held common beliefs on the subject and could not significantly disagree because they were Jews. Obviously, Miss McCarthy doesn't believe such nonsense and yet it is a clear implication of several of her arguments. Notably, Miss McCarthy omits any reference to Norman Podhoretz's excellent article on Miss Arendt's book in *Commentary,* a Jewish-sponsored publication. Can Mr. Podhoretz be accused of slandering Miss Arendt in that article? Is *Commentary* in on the hate campaign?

Miss McCarthy also appears to accept the discredited view that Christian ethics are superior to Jewish ethics. The Jews still have the Pharasaic stigma clinging to them. Pity is a uniquely Christian virtue and so is forgiveness. "And if Miss Arendt, a Jew, found it in her heart to pity Eichmann, is this a sin? Is this 'aesthetics'? To a Christian, it is ethics; can this be the Gentile 'blind spot'? A Christian is commanded not only to pity but to forgive his enemies." The implication is clear; Jews are incapable of Christian pity and forgiveness and their tradition lacks the proper moral commandments. But this is preposterous and

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smacks of the most uninformed kind of Christian fundamentalism. Worse yet, Miss McCarthy is careless in comparing Jewish and Christian values. She does not compare the *behavior* of Christians to the behavior of Jews, but rather the *ethic* of Christianity to the behavior of Jews. Surely, pity and forgiveness have not been characteristic of Christian behavior, especially with regard to the Jews.

Jewish attitudes toward Miss Arendt and her book have been varied. No doubt, some have slandered her, but even at the hands of the most zealous guardians of the American Jewish establishment she has fared no worse than some critics of the American Jewish community—Philip Roth, for example. Some have questioned the reliability of her sources and her documentation; others, unlike Miss McCarthy, have not discovered irony in Miss Arendt's comments about Eichmann's Zionism. This, not only because in context they do not seem like irony, but also because in her other writings Miss Arendt exhibits no particular talent for irony or ever indulges in it. The main lines of criticism center, of course, on Miss Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann and her criticism of the leadership of the *Judenräte*. Both Miss McCarthy and Miss Arendt appear to believe that the latter's analysis of Eichmann is the true one and that the Israeli interpretation is both false and morally inferior. But Miss Arendt's analysis is also an interpretation and a questionable one. It is "cute," "sophisticated" and "modern" in a way which makes the Israeli analysis appear crude and naive. Nevertheless, as Mr. Podhoretz demonstrates, it is perverse and does not make the Israeli view appear less plausible. Perhaps Mr. Hausner did shout too often, and perhaps there has been a great deal of loose talk about monsters, but the fact remains that the straightforward Israeli version of Eichmann, his crimes and his motives, has not been discredited by Miss Arendt; it has only been disputed. Miss McCarthy writes with such indignation that she cannot conceive of anyone wanting to support or defend the more conventional interpretation of Eichmann, but she has not answered those like Miss Syrkin, Mr. Abel and Mr. Podhoretz who, in varying degrees, find this version quite reasonable and acceptable.

On the issue of the complicity of the *Judenrat* leadership in the "Final Solution," there are several lines of legitimate criticism. Mr. Abel clearly shows that the existence of a *Judenrat* was not a *necessary* condition for mass destruction of Jews. Miss McCarthy's reply that "the story of the Jews of the East was separate from the story of Eichmann, to which Miss Arendt restricted herself as much as possible" is beside the point. If mass exterminations of Jews took place without benefit of

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Judenräte, then the claim that *Judenräte* were *necessary* conditions of mass destruction breaks down.

A brief comment is in order on the "Zionist-Israeli" vs. the "Humanity-universal" interpretation of the Eichmann case. Miss Arendt, Miss McCarthy, Mr. Bell and others would have it that the Israelis missed a golden opportunity to treat the Eichmann case in universal terms as a trial for crimes against humanity. Generally, this line of reasoning maintains, the Israelis failed to realize that their safety lies not in a "homeland, an army, and a foreign policy . . . but in the safety of humanity." Miss Arendt is universal, the Israelis parochial, and universality of course is always superior to parochialism. But one wonders, what is this "safety of humanity"? Is it the safety provided by the Christian world during the Hitler days? Is it the safety of the world which is busily rearming Germany? Is it the safety of Argentina in not prosecuting or expelling Nazis? The "safety of humanity" has a very hollow ring to many Jews, and Zionists, who, whatever else their faults, apparently learned more from the history of the twentieth century then those intellectuals who so brilliantly interpreted it, and still pinned their hopes on a liberal or socialist millenium. Zionists have always bothered intellectuals, especially American Jewish intellectuals, not only for what Morris Cohen once called their tribalism, but more importantly, I think, because they took anti-Semitism seriously. If the Jews pinned their hopes on "humanity" more of them would be dead and many more would be victims of a variety of anti-Jewish persecutions. Besides, why is it always ethically inferior to act "parochially"? Protection of loved ones is a universal value and crimes against Jews are in a very legitimate sense crimes against humanity.

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IRVING HOWE

In the Winter 1964 *PR,* Miss Mary McCarthy writes: "I am told that at a meeting held under the auspices of *Dissent* to discuss Miss Arendt's book only one voice from the audience was raised in her defense and that voice was shouted down; some other Jews disagreed with what was being said but they remained silent. In such an atmosphere, so remote from that of free speech, *Partisan Review* published Lionel Abel's 'The Aesthetics of Evil' . . ." etc.

Miss McCarthy has been misinformed.

When *Dissent* first planned its forum, we invited Miss Arendt herself to speak. She declined. So did Bruno Bettelheim, whom we next invited as an authority holding views similar to Miss Arendt's. We then asked Raul Hilberg, author of a scholarly volume on which Miss Arendt leaned, and Daniel Bell—two writers whose views, we had reason to believe, were more or less close to Miss Arendt's. When they accepted, we felt we had a reasonable balance—the other speakers being Lionel Abel and Marie Syrkin, whom Miss McCarthy designates as "propagandists" (for what?).

At the meeting itself, most of the discussion from the floor was critical of Miss Arendt. The chairman, myself, therefore asked twice for speakers who might support her. None rose to speak, though several of her supporters were present. (Whether they were all or mainly Jews I did not try to determine, since it is not our policy to arrange discussions on the basis of a racial census.) Only after the chairman announced that discussion from the floor was over, did Alfred Kazin jump up to speak. Though I regarded this intervention as irregular, I gave him the floor and he spoke his piece.

The meeting was excited and passionate; there were occasional interruptions from the floor; but at no point—I repeat: *at no point*—was anyone, not Bell or Hilberg or Kazin, "shouted down." Everyone who rose to speak was allowed to finish.

Had Miss McCarthy troubled to check her story, she might have spared herself a needless error and *Dissent* a gratuitous insult.

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ROBERT LOWELL

Both Hannah Arendt and Lionel Abel have written with such intelligence and force that any comment by me is likely to seem weak and impertinent. I particularly wish to avoid saying anything about the Jewish committees, or Abel's unanswerable, "What would you have done?" and "What could you have done?" I do think he distorts the painfully patient examination Miss Arendt gives this question. Her portrait of Eichmann, far from being lenient, is a masterpiece in rendering the almost unreadably repellent. I never felt she was condescending, or hard, or driven by a perverse theory, or by any motive except a heroic desire for the truth.

PR

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DWIGHT MACDONALD

SIRS:

When the front page of the *N. Y. Times Book Review* a year ago carried a "review" of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* which described it as defending the Nazis, the Gestapo, Himmler and Eichmann (while slandering their Jewish victims) I shrugged and thought, well, Musmanno, and well, the Sunday *Times*. (Whose editors echoed their reviewer's demagogy with the headline: "MAN WITH AN UNSPOTTED CONSCIENCE.") For I had read the book and found it the opposite: a masterpiece of historical journalism that explained the real horror of Nazi genocide, as against the clichés of forensic indignation mobilized by Mr. Musmanno.

My shrug was premature. The *Times* review proved to be merely an early gun in a barrage that was already being laid down in the Jewish press while the book was being serialized in the *New Yorker*. The headline in the *Intermountain Jewish News* (April 12, 1963) was a little blunt: "SELF-HATING JEWESS WRITES PRO-EICHMANN SERIES"—haven't seen "Jewess" in print since those fascist sheets in the thirties. But it indicated an approach that came to include magazines I read, respect and even write for. Their strictures were more moderate and sophisticated, but they followed the Musmanno line: the book was soft on Eichmann, hard on the Jews. And the closest to Musmanno in spirit was Lionel Abel's, I'm sorry to say, since I've been associated with *Partisan Review*, as editor and contributor, for a long time. I thought Mary McCarthy's "Hue and Cry" brilliantly (and sensibly) dealt with Mr. Abel—settled his hash you might say—and I shall try not to re-hash too much.

I

The moral crux of Abel's indictment is that "He [Eichmann] comes off so much better in her book than do his victims." Because, he claims, the author takes a heartless aesthetic approach to the whole ghastly business: "If a man holds a gun at the head of another and forces him to kill his friend, the man with a gun will be aesthetically less ugly than the one who out of fear of death has killed his friend. . . . And if we turn to the extermination of approximately five million people, does it seem proper that the executioner and his host of victims should be judged in aesthetic rather than in moral and political terms?" Miss McCarthy has shown the logical and moral fallacy in the first sentence, which is so

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gross as to raise doubts about Abel's competence in both departments. As to the second, I would answer with the rhetorically expected No, adding that it also would seem to me "improper," to say the least, to present Eichmann as "better" than his victims. If I thought this were the tendency of the book, I should not defend it, nor should I have the respect and affection for Hannah Arendt that I do. In fact, I don't see how I could bear to be in the same room with her. I have known both Mr. Abel and Miss Arendt for many years, and I must confess that the notion of the former giving lessons in morality to the latter strikes me as comic.

But, not to be too hard on your reviewer, his line of attack is one that has been taken by others, in print and in talk. Less crudely and with less personal malice—I remember an extraordinary article by Abel in *New Politics* which contemptuously dismissed Miss Arendt as a philosopher (indeed, as the most modestly endowed of rational creatures)—but with the same content. A distinguished Jewish man of letters—an old friend of Miss Arendt's who had defended her against intemperate attacks like Abel's—said to me recently: "Yes, a brilliant book, but I wish she hadn't blamed the victims more than the executioners." This (to me) startling judgment was echoed in *Dissent* by Marie Syrkin: "The only one who comes out better than when he came in is the defendant. The victim comes out worst." And in *Commentary* by Norman Podhoretz: "In place of the monstrous Nazi, she gives us the 'banal' Nazi; in place of the Jew as virtuous martyr, she gives us the Jew as accomplice in evil; and in place of the confrontation of guilt and innocence, she gives us the 'collaboration' of criminal and victim." To "cultural lag" we must now add a new concept: "cultural throwback." One would think Mr. Podhoretz had never read any of the literature on the Nazi concentration camps, whose rationale was carried over into the wartime death camps. As described by Rousset, Kogon, Bettelheim and other survivors, this rationale was precisely what Mr. Podhoretz describes with an air of incredulity.

"I have it on the authority of Dr. Jacob Robinson, special assistant to Justice Jackson at the Nuremberg Trials and to Prosecutor Hausner in the preparation of the case against Eichmann," Abel writes impressively, "that there are some eight monographs in Yiddish and in Hebrew on the discussions of the Jewish Council's leaders with left-wing Zionists and Socialists." He continues less impressively: "I have not been able to examine these monographs myself; they are yet to be translated. But I have it again on the authority of Dr. Robinson that in these discussions outright defiance of the Nazis was proposed. . . . What argu-

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ments were given by the Councils' leaders one would like to know. . . . Now I, for one, am not at all sure that the arguments for collaboration might not have been more logical. . . ."

Abel takes the word of an interested party for the contents of "some eight monographs" he hasn't seen and couldn't have read if he had. He "would like to know" the arguments for collaboration—one would think he and Dr. Robinson could have found an hour or two for some oral translation—and then proceeds to demonstrate just what the arguments must have been. How enviable, such a mind! Miss Arendt's is comparatively pedestrian: to reach conclusions, it must labor through court records and other boring data. Abel's needs only one datum, and that a fascinating one: itself. It is a perpetual motion machine, self-powered and frictionless, since it has freed itself from outside data (whose introduction into the mind invariably causes friction since they are not identical with it). The only trouble is that those eight monographs turn out to be irrelevant to Abel's argument. For Miss Arendt, far from demanding "outright defiance," is at pains to show it would have been useless and suicidal. Her objection is simply to the Councils' *existence;* she thinks that Jewish leaders should not have cooperated with the Nazis to form them: "There was no possibility of resistance, but there existed the possibility of *doing nothing.* The distinction between passive evasion and "outright defiance" may be a nuance too subtle for Abel's intellectual machinery, but it has lately redeemed itself by producing a remarkable statistic. "Miss Arendt's book was anything but truthful," he writes in a letter in the *New Republic* of April 4th. "It contains no less than 600 distortions of fact, a record, I believe, for a book of 256 pages." Not 587 distortions of fact, not 608, but exactly 600. Dr. Mortimer J. Adler, whose mind has something in common with Abel's, has counted the Great Ideas of the Western World, but he ended up with an untidy 102.

II

Mr. Bell and Miss McCarthy have explained at length why Miss Arendt's Eichmann is more repulsive and sinister than the scarecrow "monster" rigged up by Prosecutor Hausner and accepted by Mr. Abel. Even had I not been convinced by Miss Arendt's portrait, it wouldn't have occurred to me that she was trying to make him look *better;* I might have thought she had not got a likeness, but not that she was flattering the sitter.

Her subtitle, "The Banality of Evil," is also objected to. In *Encounter* (January, 1964) Gershon Sholem calls it "a catchword" that is not "the

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product of profound analysis," unlike her earlier concept of "radical evil." She agrees she has changed her mind since *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "It is my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. . . . Only the good has depth and can be radical." I see nothing shocking here: the discrepancy between the personal mediocrity of Stalin and Hitler, the banality of their ideas, and the vastness of the evils they inflicted—is she really the first to notice this? "She claims that Eichmann was commonplace and mediocre," writes Abel. "But by the power of the totalitarian state, he was able to exterminate a whole people." I don't understand that "but." I wonder if Abel thinks Lee Oswald became less "commonplace and mediocre" after he had killed President Kennedy—Oswald's mother has told reporters they'd better take her and her son more seriously "because we're in the history books now."

Dostoevsky would not have found "the banality of evil" a catchword. When Satan visits Ivan Karamazov, he proves to be a shabby-genteel "hanger-on of the better class." "You flunky!" cries Ivan, threatening to kick him. "You are stupid and vulgar." This devil sounds very much like Arendt's Eichmann: "My friend, above all things I want to be a gentleman and recognized as such. . . . It's generally accepted in society that I am a fallen angel. By God, I can't conceive how I could ever have been an angel. . . . I prize only my reputation as a well-bred gentleman." Like Eichmann, he has pretensions to big ideas. "Don't talk philosophy, you ass!" Ivan exclaims. But the devil's final speech is a shrewd thrust: "I repeat, moderate your expectations. . . . You are really angry with me for not having appeared to you in a red glow, with thunder and lightning, with scorched wings, and for showing myself in such a modest guise. You are wounded, in the first place, in your aesthetic feelings, and secondly, in your pride." That five million Jews could have been slaughtered by contemptible mediocrities like Eichmann must be hard for the survivors to accept; it trivializes the horror, robs it of meaning. It must be especially hard to take the fact that Eichmann wasn't even a serious anti-Semite—in fact, wasn't a serious anything.

III

Miss McCarthy's claim that reviews by Gentiles were favorable and those by Jews unfavorable was not convincing to me. Seven exceptions were too many, especially when the four Jewish exceptions were such weighty names as Alvarez, Bell, Lichtheim and Bettelheim—the last's article in *The New Republic,* was the best treatment I've seen. However,

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the hostile reviews I've read do seem motivated less by rationality than by Jewish patriotism—goys like Crossman and Musmanno might be called Honorary Semites. And I think her broader claim is accurate: that reactions *in general* divide along Jewish and non-Jewish lines, and that this "is even more pronounced in private conversation." I've had the same experience of feeling "like a child with a reading defect in a class of normal readers" when discussing the book with Jewish friends. We often disagree even on what the book is *about*: Eichmann and Nazism, I'd thought, but they talk, and write, as if it was equally about the Jewish Councils. Yet, as Miss McCarthy notes, out of 256 pages, less than fifteen are devoted to this question. Abel devotes half his space to this one-eighteenth of the book, nor is this ratio exceptional. So I conclude they are writing more as Jews than as critics.[1]

I object, for instance, to some of Miss Arendt's generalizations about another people: the Germans—but this doesn't make me reject the whole book. She states that "many Germans . . . probably an overwhelming majority . . . knew, of course," about the death camps. I've been following this question since 1945, when I wrote "The Responsibility of Peoples" (reprinted in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*; see esp. pp. 42-3), and the "of course" seems to me to run the other way: the Nazis did everything possible to keep the 1942-1944 Jewish death camps secret—in contrast with the publicity they gave, for reasons of political terrorization,

1. And as peculiarly organization-minded Jews at that. These fifteen pages criticize not, as the critics imply, the Jewish *masses* but the Jewish *leadership*. "If the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery, but the total number of victims would hardly have been between 4,500,000 and 6,000,000 people." Why is this sentence so universally shocking? That more Jews would have escaped if their leaders, thinking they could bargain with the Nazis, had not formed Jewish Councils to organize them for transport to the death camps—this seems a reasonable speculation, if only because a leaderless flock is harder to round up. (Also it's hard to see how the catastrophe could have been *greater*.) Miss Arendt also makes a moral criticism of the Jewish leadership: she says they should have refused to do the Nazis' dirty work for them and that there is no moral arithmetic by which X lives can be sacrified to save Y lives, because nobody has the right to decide who should be saved at the expense of whom. I agree but even if I didn't, I would think this a perfectly respectable, and familiar, position. Unless, of course, I thought it wrong, *per se*, to criticize Jews. Although some of Miss Arendt's most violent denouncers, like Abel, cut their eye teeth on Marxist theory, they in this case identify the Jewish masses with their leaders, writing as though European Jewry were a classless Utopian community. They actually seem to have forgotten more Marxism than I have.

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to the earlier concentration camps. I also object to her calling the German people *en masse* "accomplices," since even those who did know would have had to be heroes to do anything about it; and, as she herself has observed, it is inhuman to demand more than a few heroes from any population—German, Russian, Jewish, or American. And I further object to her statement that the July, 1944 conspirators against Hitler were "not inspired by a crisis of conscience or by what they knew other people had been made to suffer; they were motivated exclusively by their conviction of the coming defeat and ruin of Germany." Allen Dulles's *Germany's Underground* states of the Kreisau Circle, led by Count von Moltke and Count von Wartenburg, which prepared the 1944 plot: "Its economic and political program was one of Christian Socialism," with which William L. Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* agrees. Shirer writes of Count von Stauffenberg, who planted the bomb: "The anti-Jewish pogroms of 1938 first cast doubts in his mind about Hitler," while Dulles quotes an exchange from Wartenburg's testimony before the Nazi court that condemned him:

> PROSECUTOR FREISLER: But concisely, you declare on the question of the Jews that you disagreed with their extermination?
>
> WARTENBURG: The decisive factor which brings together all these questions is the totalitarian claim of the state on the individual which forces him to renounce his moral and religious obligations to God.

I also find unsatisfying her rationale for hanging Eichmann: ". . . we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang." But in fact many people still exist who are quite willing to share the earth with an Eichmann: fascists, Nazis, anti-Semitic fanatics like our own George Lincoln Rockwell, and I don't see how they can be deprived of their human status—it's not like citizenships, after all—unless by circular reasoning: if you want to share the earth with an Eichmann, you are not human.

But all these errors, if such they be, don't seem to me to importantly affect the book, nor do I feel it necessary to explain them by imputing to the author callousness, perversity, distorting of facts or other moral defects.

A Jewish friend complained that Miss McCarthy had "raised the Jewish issue," another puzzlement, since I had thought that was precisely what critics like Abel had done, and that she was objecting to this tactic. I find it depressing to have to talk about "Jewish friends" and "Jewish critics," after all those years when I'd thought we'd gotten beyond such

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labels in serious discussion, but I can see no other explanation for the virulence and unfairness with which *Eichmann in Jerusalem* has been attacked. A hitherto respected political thinker is treated like a suspect in a police court. She uses irony, for instance, a dangerous device if the reader, from stupidity or calculation, insists on reading it straight. (In this case, I'd call it calculated stupidity.) "Should any one be blamed for raising an eyebrow to the suggestion that Eichmann loved the Jews?" Mr. Musmanno inquires. Mr. Podhoretz paraphrases Miss Arendt: "it even called for a certain idealism to do what Eichmann and his cohorts did," though on pp. 37-38 she explains just what she means by Eichmann's "idealism." "Miss Arendt in this connection," he continues, "quotes the famous remark attributed to Himmler," which he then transcribes dead-pan; one gets the impression she drew on Himmler for a definition of idealism. Mr. Abel is solemnly foolish, as usual: "Now Miss Arendt's effort to present Eichmann as a convinced adherent of the Zionist idealogy is, as Marie Syrkin has shown, completely unconvincing. For quite obviously a man in charge of the extermination of all European Jewry could hardly have been committed 'forever' to the Zionist ideology." Obviously. One might expect even Miss Arendt to see *that.*

It is often implied, in these reviews, that to say the Jewish leadership shouldn't have cooperated with the Nazis is to say they are equally guilty, much as certain Catholics claim that Hochhuth's *The Deputy* displaces the guilt for the death camps from the Nazis onto the Pope. This is such nonsense, logically, that I can't but see prejudice: to criticize people for not speaking out against a crime (the Pope) or for mistakenly trying to moderate it by assuming some of the control (the Jewish Councils) is not to minimize the responsibility of those who actually commit the crime. The fault of the Pope and the Councils was that they compromised with an evil that was as close to being absolute as anything is in this imperfect world. But it was the Nazis alone who killed the Jews.

It is an interesting, and depressing, historical exercise to imagine what the reactions would have been to a book like this in the thirties, when all of us, from Miss McCarthy to Mr. Abel, despised national and racial feelings and were hot for truth, justice and other universals. The suggestion that certain people and institutions should be exempt from criticism would have embarassed everybody (except the Stalinists). But the death camps have cast their shadow. Even Daniel Bell concludes on what seemed to me a false note. "Many of Miss Arendt's strictures are correct, if one can live by a universalistic standard." "In this situation," he continues, "one's identity as a Jew, as well as a *philosophe,* is relevant. The agony of Miss Arendt's book is precisely that she takes her stand

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so unyieldingly on the side of disinterested justice, and that she judges both Nazi and Jew. But abstract justice, as the Talmudic wisdom knew, is sometimes too 'strong' a yardstick to judge the world." And in his *Encounter* letter, Gershon Sholem, makes the same complaint: "In the Jewish tradition, there is a concept . . . we know as *Ahabath Israel*: 'Love of the Jewish people.' In you, dear Hannah, as in so many intellectuals who came from the German Left, I find little trace of this."

I think Mr. Bell and Mr. Sholem have made explicit, because their intention was understanding rather than polemics, the concealed, perhaps often unconscious, assumption that explains the violence of the Jewish attacks on Miss Arendt's book. Both reproach her because she lacks a special feeling in favor of her fellow Jews. But such a prejudice would have made it impossible for her to speculate on how the catastrophe might have been less complete had the Jewish leadership followed different policies, or to attempt a realistic interpretation of the Nazi horror as the work of men (who can be understood) and not of "monsters" and demons (who cannot). That is, she tried to learn something from history, an enterprise in which I don't think either the Talmud or *Ahabath Israel* would have been useful.[2] I am not Jewish, but if I were, I hope I would not agree with Mr. Bell that "in this situation, one's identity as a Jew . . . is relevant," if it means applying a different ("weaker") yardstick to Jews. A yardstick is not a yardstick if it is more or less than three feet long, and justice is not justice unless it is "universalistic." I am old-fashioned enough (as of the thirties) to still find these favored, special, exceptional categories of race or nation morally suspect and intellectually confusing. And so I take heart in a book like *Eichmann in Jerusalem.*

2. One might expect the editor of our most intelligent Jewish magazine to see that Miss Arendt's criticisms, however tactless, of the policies that at least didn't *prevent* the 1942-1944 catastrophe might hold lessons for the future. But Mr. Podhoretz ends his article plaintively: "The Nazis destroyed a third of the Jewish people. In the name of all that is humane, will the remnant never let up on itself?" Letting up on one's self may be humane—there are other adjectives—but it doesn't make for understanding, or survival.

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LIONEL ABEL

SIRS:

Since I believe Miss Hannah Arendt has been shown to be wrong in her judgment of the Jewish leadership, and since I think Miss McCarthy's arguments in defense of Miss Arendt's position on this matter quite worthless, I shall not answer them, being content to refer readers to my original article. I cannot refrain, however, from meeting some of the points Miss McCarthy made in defense of Miss Arendt's portrait of Eichmann. For while there are few who are now willing to accept Miss Arendt on the Jewish councils, there are still many who support her on Eichmann. Moreover I believe Miss Arendt's misjudgment of Eichmann—for that is how I prefer to designate her view of him—is even dearer to her than her misjudgment of the Jewish leaders.

What was Eichmann really like? He did not talk only in clichés. Certainly his remark, "I will jump into my grave laughing, etc.," is hardly a cliché. Who, before Eichmann, ever said anything like that? Eichmann was not lacking in personal arrogance. He challenged as exalted a personage as the SS general Kurt Wolff to a duel merely for breaking off a telephone conversation. (The cause of their quarrel was the SS general's request that Eichmann spare the life of a single Jew.) Was Eichmann normal? Miss McCarthy says there were six psychiatrists who pronounced him normal. I should like to know the name of even one of these psychiatrists. But I do know the name of one psychiatrist who did not call Eichmann normal—Szondi, inventor of the famous Szondi test, which was given Eichmann in Jerusalem. Not knowing to whom the test had been given, Szondi, analyzing its results, asserted that the subject [Eichmann] was "a man obsessed with a dangerous and insatiable urge to kill, arising out of a desire for power." Eichmann was not an ordinary man, with the ordinary man's conscience—and lack of conscience. Eichmann was morally monstrous. To say this, of course, is not to state a fact, but to make an interpretation of the facts. My claim, though, is that the facts about Eichmann impose this interpretation on us. Surely it is our duty—as well as our right—to regard as essential in Eichmann's life what he himself made essential in his conduct of it. And nobody denies what his significant acts as a Nazi were, or that these acts were, morally speaking, monstrous. Was Eichmann personally brutal, vicious, sadistic? I suspect so, but I do not have to assert that he was. It will be recalled that Jean-Paul Sartre in the famous portrait he gave of the anti-Semite did not ascribe

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to the typical hater of Jews any incidental personality traits such as brutality, viciousness, sadism: Sartre nonetheless called his anti-Semite a "murderer." Why that? Because, said Sartre, the anti-Semite would like to appear to those of his fellows who are Jews, not as a man, but as a sheer force of nature, like lava, like rock. I am reminded here that the Lutheran pastor Heinrich Gruber testified that in his dealings with Eichmann he found him "like marble," "like a block of ice." That Eichmann was a monster, I say, can be inferred merely from the task he took on himself as a Nazi, for he was not conscripted into serving the "Final Solution." And in fulfilling his task, Eichmann was not an underling, one who took orders. He said of himself: "I would have been a simpleton if I had just taken orders." And there is the telling fact that Eichmann planned to block Hitler's order when the Führer himself wanted to spare some seven thousand families of Hungarian Jews. Eichmann was not without political conviction: to Sassen—he had no reason to lie to Sassen, as he did have reason to lie in the Jerusalem court—Eichmann remarked: "When I came to the conclusion that we had to do to the Jews what we did, I worked with the fanaticism of a true National Socialist." Eichmann was neither so uninterested in ideas, nor so ill-read, as to have been incapable of reading *Mein Kampf*. Miss McCarthy, who thinks otherwise, writes:

> According to Abel, Eichmann must have thought about Nazism politically since he thought about Zionism. But Eichmann's "thought" was a parody of the idea of thinking. Had *Mein Kampf* been his "Bible," he might have pressed a flower in it.

I suggest that Miss McCarthy look again into Miss Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* for in that work Miss Arendt implies that Eichmann had actually read Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason,* and that under questioning he ". . . came up with an approximately correct definition of the Categorical Imperative" (p. 121). Now a man who could give an approximately correct definition of the Categorical Imperative must surely have been capable of assimilating the contents of *Mein Kampf*, which was read by millions.

Eichmann was not as Miss Arendt portrayed him; her judgments of him, on every crucial point, are clearly at variance with the facts. Yet many people want to agree with Miss Arendt on Eichmann. Why? What is there about her portrait of him which they find appealing? Whence the desire to accept her view of the man as ordinary, normal, and lacking in Nazi conviction? I think that what is at issue here is brought out clearly by Miss McCarthy when she says I tried to fit Eichmann to his crime, as if this were some intellectual aberration of

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mine. But the whole assumption of Western law is that the criminal has an inner resemblance to his acts; this likeness must be shown. From which Hegel derived an epistemological principle: if our judgment of the inner man differs from our judgment of his acts, then both of our judgments must be false; I come now to what Miss Arendt herself regards as the main point of her book, and which she criticizes her critics for having passed over too lightly. Eichmann, she writes, is "the truth-revealer for generations to come." What she means by this cryptic phrase, I take it, is that the very existence of an Eichmann shows that our civilization has been breached, and how serious to it the breach is. For if a criminal has appeared whom we cannot judge—Miss Arendt holds that for judging Eichmann our laws were inadequate—then do we not have to look to the foundations of our values? Why pretend they are secure? I believe Miss Arendt thinks that in trying and passing sentence on Eichmann, the Israeli court covered up the crisis to civilization revealed—and deepened—by the advent of Hitler.

Those who have not read Miss Arendt's book may wonder at how the existence of one unjudgable criminal can instance a breakdown in civilization. To be sure, Miss Arendt has in mind the host of other ex-Nazi officials, whom she thinks quite as unjudgable as Eichmann. But this is not her real point, which is expressed, I think in her whole contention about Eichmann, namely that he was an ordinary man, normal, did monstrous things, and was not a case of "political indoctrination." But if Eichmann was an ordinary man, then is not the ordinary man an Eichmann, and capable of doing what Eichmann did? Is this true? Those who would like to believe this true may point to the host of administrators and technicians who nowadays, in obedience to a command from above, stand ready to release forces of terrible destructiveness. Evidently Miss McCarthy, like other defenders of Miss Arendt, identifies Eichmann with persons of this sort. For Miss McCarthy notes that ordinary men dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. But were these men, if ordinary, at all like Eichmann? And are our host of administrators and technicians like him? I think not. What is more, they are not like Miss Arendt's portrait of Eichmann. *But then Eichmann himself was not like her portrait of him.* For one thing, he was not without political conviction. I see no reason to doubt his own statement, already cited: "When I reached the conclusion that it was necessary to do to the Jews what we did, I worked with the fanaticism of a true National Socialist." Moreover, Miss Arendt has not produced one shred of evidence to show Eichmann was not convinced by Nazism. Her contention that he was not is only a guess, at best, an intellectual construction, as is, in fact, her whole characterization of him.

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I, for one, do not believe that even Eichmann could have devoted himself to the murder of millions, with the persistence, skill, and zeal he showed, over a period of years, if he had not had some justifying political idea. Miss Arendt does believe this, and that is why she can also believe administrators and technicians, many of them thoroughly ordinary men, are capable of acting as Eichmann did, and without being committed to any political idea. But if one reads Miss Arendt rightly—attention, Miss McCarthy!—it becomes apparent that she herself considers Eichmann a monster, and precisely because she considers him ordinary! Eichmann, as Miss Arendt sees him, is not, of course, the kind of monster we know from the past. He is a monster, nonetheless, but of a new-fangled sort, a sheer creation of modern times; and the kind of monster that Miss Arendt thinks is nowadays found everywhere. His is none other than the average man, without pathological drives or exceptional traits, yet who is nowadays capable of mass murder; *and this without any need for political ideas to align his inner being with his outward acts.* Eichmann, alone in the dock in Jerusalem, was to Miss Arendt unjudgable. But he represents to her millions and millions of men who, in her view, are potentially criminal and essentially unjudgable: the ordinary men we see today, as modern times have fashioned them. Thus the message of our time is the "banality of evil."

But if our civilization is turning out millions of "ordinary" monsters—and at a greater rate even than our plants turn out cars—if it has even abolished the difference between the "ordinary" and the "monstrous"—then it is no longer a civilization; it has already fallen into barbarism. Is this what Miss Arendt thinks finally? If not, would she have permitted herself to write of Eichmann that he is "the truth-revealer for generations to come"?

Is civilization damaged irreparably? If so, I think no one could says this clearly; in trying to we would be reduced to absurdities; some of our contemporary playwrights want to be. Far the worst in human affairs has not yet occurred, says the poet, if we can still talk about the worst. And even if our state be worse than I take it to be, what help can come from false ideas? There are many people, though, who, as I noted before, are ready to accept Miss Arendt's portrait of Eichmann, and become angry when told what a poor likeness it is. I suggest this reason for their attitude: Miss Arendt's view of Eichmann supports the belief, held with a pleasure I, for one, find peculiar, that the West has been stricken, maybe mortally. But however it be with the West, should not we ourselves make an effort to be civilized? What Eichmann was, what the Jewish leaders were, can only be determined from

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the facts as we know them, and we have no right to deduce a judgment of them from our speculations about the modern world—not even from our most personal response to it; not from rage or despair at what has happened already, and not from fear of what is ahead.

(*Editors' note*: *Since Mr. Macdonald's piece came in as we were going to press, Mr. Abel has had to comment on it separately.*)

Why does Dwight Macdonald want to turn what began as a debate into a barroom brawl? I never attacked Miss Arendt's character, so Mr. Macdonald is not really answering me when he implies that I myself have a bad one. Perhaps I have. But I never thought of *Partisan Review* as a Sunday School; neither did I think of it as a saloon. I am not sure from the tone of his piece what Mr. Macdonald, formerly one of its editors, thinks *PR* is now.

About this piece of Mr. Macdonald's: in the single instance in which he argues seriously, citing facts as evidence, he argues not against me but against Miss Arendt. In trying to disprove Miss Arendt's view that the German people had some responsibility for Hitler he shows what we all know: that when he has facts, he can argue. But for the rest of his piece, on the main theses of Miss Arendt's book, theses which he insists he supports, Mr. Macdonald relies entirely on abusive cracks against Miss Arendt's critics—me especially.

So why should I answer him? No, I will use the space remaining to me to meet his friend Miss McCarthy's arguments, for she, unlike him, gave some. I must confess that when I first read her piece against me, I thought her mind was a famine; but now I see that to Dwight Macdonald it must have seemed like a feast. Perhaps I dismissed some of her points too summarily.

On the subject of the Jewish Councils: In reply to my criticism of Miss Arendt for not having treated the mass executions of Jews in Russia, Miss McCarthy argued: the answer is Eichmann, her point being that Eichmann was not concerned in these Russian killings which had no relation to his problems of transport or logistics.

But whatever Eichmann was concerned with, Miss Arendt had to be concerned with the ease with which Jews were killed in Russia, where there was no Jewish leadership. For since Miss Arendt held that the Jews were weakened by their leaders (Mr. Macdonald and Miss McCarthy evidently concur), the mass execution of leaderless Jews in Russia is a fact she was bound in all conscience to evaluate. So Miss McCarthy's argument for Miss Arendt on this point is not a very good one. It is made still less valid by the fact that Miss Arendt in her book

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gave space to the treatment of a great many matters which had little relation to Eichmann or his transport problems. For example, Miss Arendt goes out of her way to assert in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that two of the principal Nazi exterminators of Jews, Heydrich and Frank, were both Jewish, Heydrich a half-Jew and Frank "probably even a full Jew." Now surely the Jewishness of Frank and Heydrich has nothing to do with Eichmann or his problems. But it does have very much to do with one of Miss Arendt's main contentions: namely, that Jews played an important role in the murder of their fellow Jews. The fact is that neither Heydrich nor Frank was Jewish; and Jacob Robinson, in his scholarly work, *Eichmann, Arendt and the Holocaust*, which I have read in manuscript, has fully documented the flimsy evidence on the basis of which Miss Arendt hastily concluded that Heydrich was a half Jew and that Frank was "probably even a full Jew." This is only one of the "no less than 600" distortions of fact I said Miss Arendt was guilty of. The charge is of course Jacob Robinson's, and when he makes it publicly himself, it will be a much more serious matter than when I made it in *The New Republic*. Mr. Macdonald can of course hope to disprove it, but it cannot be laughed away.

Another point in Miss McCarthy's piece which perhaps I should have answered was her argument that I used the word *forces* improperly when in my article I wrote of a man who with a gun *forces* another man to kill his friend. I was implying, Miss McCarthy claims, that the man threatened with the gun was not free to die rather than to kill. Now I do not think there was any such implication in my use of the word *forces,* which I used as it is naturally used in our language. As Miss McCarthy sees it though, it would have been truer (more morally sensitive?) to say that a man who kills his friend under the threat of force is *tempted* to the deed. I cannot agree. The *threat* of force is not the *lure* of temptation. Would Miss McCarthy say that people who were tortured by the Nazis were *tempted* by their torturers into compliance? Certainly the word *forced* sounds more right to me. Otherwise we would speak of "totalitarian temptation" regimes rather than regimes of "totalitarian terror."

So much for Miss McCarthy's arguments: I think I have now answered every one which could be construed as serious. And so much for Dwight Macdonald, who chose to depend on Miss McCarthy—he has been unable to advance any argument of his own. His contribution is to abuse me, and Norman Podhoretz, also Crossman and Trevor-Roper, whom he has not scrupled to attack as "honorary Semites." It all comes down finally to calling people "Jews."

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MARY McCARTHY

SIRS:

In reply to Abel. " 'I will jump into my grave laughing.' Who, before Eichmann, ever said anything like that?" Well, Wedekind. "Happy is he who jumps over fresh graves merrily." Apparently Eichmann had this winged word in mind.

I cannot supply the names of any of the psychiatrists who pronounced Eichmann normal. Miss Arendt tells us in her book that there were half a dozen. Does Abel have any grounds for hinting that she is lying? Furthermore, if Szondi was right, Eichmann belonged in a lunatic asylum.

Of course Eichmann was a Nazi. Who ever denied it?

The question is, what was a Nazi? The German Everyman, it would seem, during the Hitler years. This is becoming evident again in the Auschwitz trial; Arthur Miller has made the point very well in his *Herald Tribune* report. What did it take to be a Nazi, an S.S. man, an Eichmann? Very little, evidently. This is what is so terrible.

Abel now insists that Miss Arendt and I are smearing Western civilization: we are pretending that Eichmann is everywhere. This is Abel's own contribution to the discussion. Speaking only for myself, I would say that Eichmann was a peculiarly German phenomenon and is not likely to recur elsewhere. But the problem raised by Eichmann and by the "German-uncle" defendants in the Auschwitz trial is pertinent to the whole world. I believe that the environment of technology we live in is favorable to the murder of whole populations without any emotive euphoria or political commitment on the part of the technicians who would carry the operation out. These technicians (Western or Eastern) are no more exceptionally villainous or insane than anyone else. In a nuclear war, they will mildly execute orders like the bomber crew of normal men in the *Dr. Strangelove* film. The bomber crew there is full of the pathos (and the virtue) of the assembly line, each man limited in his responsibility to his own dial, or bombsight, or navigational chart. This is cleaner work than Eichmann's, and I must say that I cannot help feeling that unleashing a nuclear war is more innocent than sending Jews to the gas chamber, though this may be a prejudice and history, if there were to be any, might judge otherwise.

As for Miss Syrkin, she is right in noticing that I misparaphrased Miss Arendt. I said "Jewish Councils," and Miss Arendt spoke of Jewish leaders. But Miss Syrkin is mistaken in her figures. The sentence (p. 111)

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concludes: "between four and a half and six million people." I would not quibble about this (Miss Syrkin is probably using the *New Yorker* text, which I no longer have), except as a counterquibble; elsewhere in my article I spoke of Miss Arendt's criticism of the Jewish leaders in general. Miss Syrkin's own paraphrasing habits can be inferred from her summing-up of the "famous sentence." "Miss Arendt accuses the Jewish people in its totality." Does she?

The Neronic picture of myself listening to *Figaro* while the gas ovens roar is quite in keeping with the general flavor of Miss Syrkin's polemics, and I am grateful to her for giving your readers a sample. If anyone is willing to turn back to the last number of *PR,* he will see that I did not find "Miss Arendt's account of the extermination of six million Jews" morally exhilarating. What I found morally exhilarating was her book, which is an account of the Eichmann trial. Nor did I say that the extermination of the Jews "made sense." One of the functions of a work of art is to give sense to suffering, such as the blinding of Oedipus. I felt that Miss Arendt's book had given sense, through form, to Jewish *suffering*; in that respect, it resembled a work of art.

Mr. Weisberg's letter ends with an odd misunderstanding. I wrote that Miss Arendt was interested in the safety of humanity. Mr. Weisberg's view of humanity seems to be: what has it done for the Jews?

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WILLIAM PHILLIPS

DEAR MARY,

I have just reread your piece on the Eichmann controversy, the pieces by Lionel Abel, Marie Syrkin, Daniel Bell, and others, and I have also reread Hannah Arendt's book. I must tell you that I am bewildered and saddened by the confusion so many intelligent people have brought to issues that were clearer before they were so energetically and triumphantly clarified. Particularly depressing is the procession of polemics, with everyone arguing so cleverly, with so much wit and logic, as though those awful events were being used to sharpen one's mind and one's rhetoric. At the risk of sounding polemically sentimental and righteous, I should say my own reaction was just the opposite. On rereading the sickening accounts of the extermination of the Jews, the last thing I wanted to do was to trot out my dialectical skills, to show how clever I was in deploying the argument.

A historical disaster has been transformed, I am sorry to say, into a journalistic occasion, because people have been talking not so much about the meaning of those awful events as about what other people were saying about them. And some people seemed to think that what was being said was more awful than the events themselves. I have actually heard people say Hannah Arendt is worse than Eichmann, and there must be some who believe Abel worse than Arendt, you worse than Abel, etc.,—where does this put me? Clearly, we have here a case of criminality by dissociation. In this atmosphere, I feel it would be most useful to depolemicize the questions, not only to see the questions, themselves, more clearly, but to evaluate what has been said about them. It is true that questions do not really exist apart from their formulation, but in this controversy the questions have been so tangled up in the polemics that we have almost lost sight of them.

How should we go, backwards or forwards? Suppose we begin with you, which is why I am writing you. Your piece, though beautifully done, as is everything of yours, shows that you are, above all, out to defend Hannah—by winning a decision on points, over Hannah's critics. Hence most of your piece is intent on scoring points, some of them debaters' points that catch Lionel in a contradiction or a distortion. I am not saying your points are bad, many are good, but they are points.

One cannot properly discuss your piece without going into Hannah's book, and that I will do later. But, in the meantime, let me say a few more concrete things about your piece. You begin by saying that the

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criticism of Hannah's book is a Jewish monopoly. It is probably true that Jews are particularly sensitive about everything connected with the "dark" chapter in their history, but I don't think they have exclusive rights to sensitiveness. Gentiles, I gather from what you say, are objective and therefore, are mostly for this book. Now, if you want to count Jewish and Gentile noses, this is simply not so, and, to introduce this consideration has the effect of reducing an intellectual question to a racial question, which is just the reverse of what I thought we should be doing. (Besides, this is also a logical sin, known as the ad hominem argument.) But there is also the implication in what you say that there is some kind of Jewish conspiracy against Hannah, and that *PR* has been infected by it, possibly because its resistance is low. I can answer this, Mary, only by asserting that *PR* has almost as little to do with racial minorities as with racial majorities. Surely you can't believe that Lionel, or *PR*, or I have taken an official Jewish position on anything connected with the Eichmann affair. If professional Jews and Jewish organizations are after Hannah, this should be immediately exposed. Need I say we should be glad to print any facts about this?

But all this is a diversion from the real question raised by Hannah's book: the role of the Jewish leaders and the "character" of Eichmann. On the Jewish Councils you say "Miss Arendt's other famous sentence, that without the cooperation of the Jewish Councils four and a half to six million Jews would not have perished seems to me almost self-evidently true." But this is precisely what so few people find self-evident, for this much we do know, that people can be killed without their cooperation, and in large numbers. Nor was efficiency the main motive of the Nazis; clearly, the demoralization of the Jews was an expression of the political—as distinct from physical—sadism of the Nazi leaders. This is not to justify the cooperation of the Jewish leaders. Of course, Hannah and you are right in feeling it cannot be justified on any absolute moral grounds—I shall return to this later—but when you try to prove that the Jews would have been better off if their leaders had put up some kind of passive or active resistance you are raising practical and political questions, not moral ones, and you run into all the problems of resistance under an absolute totalitarian regime. And you seem to me to be way off when you speak of the cooperation of the Jewish Councils as "appeasement," a term that can be applied only to a nation or people that make up a political entity and not to a collection of victims. The opprobrium attached to "appeasement" is out of place here, for it implies that the Jews could have resisted effectively, which everyone, including you, denies.

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As for Eichmann, I think in defending Hannah you overstate—as she did, too—a tenable position. Lionel responded to the overstatement, not to the intention, and you in reply defend the overstatement. What I mean is that you try too hard to prove that Eichmann is "normal," that he is not a "monster"—that he is just like everyone else. My reading of Hannah is that she really was trying to indicate something else, that Eichmann's "aberrations" came out of his society and not out of his psyche. But she did not put her ideas clearly, and Lionel was quick to trip her up. Now you are in effect defending the weakest part of Hannah's arguments by trying to separate the criminal from his crime to the point where the picture we get of Eichmann is that of a mild family man, a man who liked Jews, a man who could not be a convinced Nazi, because he could not understand Nazi ideas—the boring man who lives next door to us in the country. Really, reducing Eichmann to such personal insignificance truly makes him into some kind of monster.

I see I've gotten into the controversial spirit, and I am telling you only what I disagree with in your piece. I should say, therefore, that what I like most about your piece is your attempt to bring Hannah's book into the realm of discussion from which it had been banished by some of her critics, Gentile as well as Jewish. (It is too bad you are only one-eighth, or is it one-quarter, Jewish.) Also, I agree with many of your observations: that Hannah's book was not just about the Jewish leaders; that she did not advocate resistance; that Eichmann could have been a Nazi without being a "thinker"; that Hannah does not assign equal "guilt" to Eichmann and the Jewish leaders; that she does not make Eichmann palatable.

As I wrote you last fall, I agree with many of Lionel's criticisms of *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* but I do think his approach is too polemical in that he doesn't give her any credit for the good things in her book, and where there is some ambiguity or some clumsy formulation she almost never gets the benefit of the doubt. Hence Lionel tends to overstate his case, like a District Attorney going after someone on trial. Indeed, Marie Syrkin, Lionel Abel, Weisberg, and other embattled critics often sound as though they are trying to convict Hannah, as though she were a criminal, not someone who might be wrong. They do not even concede she might be only partly wrong; a criminal is always wholly wrong. But to get back to Lionel's piece, I think he is right in saying the evidence does not indicate that non-cooperation would have saved more Jews, and in insisting that one could have expected the Jews to have acted as a principled opposition only if they had been more political, more organized, if they had represented a radical force and not simply a segment of existing society. At the same time Lionel glosses over the question of

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moral judgment. Let me put it this way. I do not feel I am the one to judge the behavior of the Jews—who is? Who can predict how he will behave in a situation where both executioners and victims are dehumanized and demoralized? Yet, if the moral question is to be raised in some absolute form, it cannot be denied that the cooperation of the Jewish leaders can be only historically understood, not morally defended.

Similarly, in reacting to Hannah's portrait of Eichmann as the functionary of evil, Lionel exaggerates his monstrous traits, and this he does mostly with rhetoric rather than with evidence.

This brings us back to Hannah's book. You have asked me concretely what I agree with and what I disagree with in Lionel's criticism of the book. I have tried to give some indication of this. But to be specific I would have to go into *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Obviously, I cannot undertake a thorough examination of Hannah's arguments here, but I can say what I think about some of her main ideas. To begin with, the charge some people have made that Hannah is anti-Semitic is crude nonsense. What is true is that she is anti-Zionist, and this bias gives a snide, slightly hostile tone to many of the things she says about official or organized Jewry, that carries her beyond her intellectual intentions. She does, of course, use the same tone whenever she talks about the complicity or innocence of the German people, but, obviously, most of our friends are less sensitive to her anti-Germanism.

It is this tone of irony, of insinuation, of moral Olympianism that makes the treatment of the Jews in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* seem so cold and harsh. No doubt many of the Jewish Councils and their leaders behaved as Hannah said they did (Hilberg and others cited the evidence earlier), but to judge this behavior, as Hannah does, at least in tone, by some ideal standards of conduct is really to ignore the hopelessness of the situation and the helplessness of the Jewish population. And to imply—more in tone than in substance—that the Jews shared with the Nazis a guilt and responsibility for their fate suggests that there were real, not ideal, alternatives. Hannah refers to, not disapprovingly, Eichmann's defense of himself on the grounds that no one, not even the Jews, questioned the fundamental aims of the Nazi regime. Such ideal moral and political opposition as Hannah invokes as a basis for criticizing the Jewish leadership exists only in revolutionary movements, and not in totalitarian states. If one might take as an analogy the treatment of the Negroes in this country, it must be said that from some absolute, revolutionary point of view, most whites and most Negroes are cooperating with the system that produces the segregation and humiliation of a minority. You have said that all Hannah asked for was non-cooperation, not resistance, that behind her criticism of Jews was an anarchic at-

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titude toward the state. I find no evidence of this in her book. Besides, would not such an anarchist stand have required a radical consciousness and organization beyond the reach of a people no better, no worse, no different from the rest of existing middle-class society? The point is not that the Jews were middle-class; it is that the society, in Europe and America, of which they were an integral part was middle-class.

The nature of Eichmann is a different kind of question, and has to do with the relation of individual to collective aberration. And I wish it had been approached by everyone in a more speculative spirit, for there are no intellectual rules I know of by which one can dismiss any view of Eichmann as obviously wrong or distasteful, as some of Hannah's critics have done. The problem, as I see it, is not so much to grasp the idea of a man who commits some monstrous acts yet in most of his daily life does not act in a monstrous way, as to understand what happens when such men become the social norm. Many if not most criminals are disguised as ordinary people. If this were not so, it would be very easy to prevent crime and apprehend criminals. The problem of Eichmann is that his criminality was public and was sanctioned by the beliefs of the community —a condition that exists everywhere, but is a special feature of totalitarian societies. Hence, no special moral or political perversion is required to produce an Eichmann; it might be said that there are thousands of potential Eichmanns. This is what Hannah means by the banality of evil, which, by the way, is an unfortunate phrase, since what she must mean is not that evil is banal but that under the Nazis a banal person, a person who might have originally delivered the mail or run a grocery store, was elevated to the role of an Eichmann. Now, frankly, I do not find this a revolutionary or a startling idea; nor is it an offensive one. The main trouble with it is that it does not allow for the transformation that must take place in an Eichmann when he "changes jobs," and this simply perpetrates the cliché of the little man who does awful things in certain situations. The horror of totalitarianism is precisely that the "little man" is transformed into an organizer of the "Final Solution." Still, I do not understand why so many people jumped on Hannah as though her view of Eichmann was just another instance of her anti-Semitism, unless, again, it is a question of tone and formulation. Apparently, some of her critics thought she was playing down the monstrousness of Eichmann by playing up his banality. As for whether or not Eichmann was a monster, I prefer to think he was, though I find the question only of rhetorical interest, since it all depends, as you have said, on whether we define the term in such a way as to exclude or to include Eichmann. I also prefer to think that Eichmann was abnormal, since I feel some talent for abnormality is required to do the things he

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did, though I can imagine a society in which children were brought up with the idea that murder is an expression of goodness.

I haven't tried to sum up what I think of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. But if I were to state a final impression, it would be that the book is a powerful account of Eichmann's contribution to the Final Solution. Still, at times, there is an unfortunate tone, that comes either from clumsy writing or from some undercurrent of bias, so that one has the feeling that the Jewish leaders, if not the Jews as a whole, are somehow being criticized for things that Hannah never succeeds in making entirely explicit. Actually, as you have intimated, most of the hue and cry would have been averted by judicious cutting—and not very much cutting at that—of the most inflamatory and ambiguous statements.

It seems to me the lesson to be learned from the horrors which Eichmann helped perpetrate is not that ordinary people can be taught the art of mass murder or that the victims can be entangled in the beliefs and forces leading to their destruction. This, unfortunately, we know. But to *know* it is not enough to prevent a recurrence. For what we do not know is how to change the social conditions that make these horrors possible. Don't you think that for this we need a more radical view of history and society, a more radical one than we find in *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* or for that matter, in many sectarian criticisms of the book which seem to be concerned only with upholding the honor of the Jews? We certainly will not learn much if we do not recognize that this is more than a Jewish question.

Affectionately,

William

P.S. I should add, for the record, that I was one of the people who told you about the *Dissent* meeting. As I recall, I told you that the atmosphere was too excited to permit calm discussion, and that nobody seemed to listen to what Alfred Kazin, who spoke up for Hannah, was saying. In fact, as I remember, he was booed by some people. Anyway, I understand your reference to the meeting as a comment on the temper of the audience, not on the conduct of the meeting.

P.P.S. I've just read Dwight's piece. He says more or less what you did but more breezily. I agree that reactions to Hannah were excessive, though he could have put it more simply and quietly. But hunting for "Jewishness" is going too far: one could hunt for anti-Semitism, too. If we're to be nostalgic, we might recall the days when the question whether someone was Jewish or Gentile was of biographical and not intellectual interest.

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GOING TO THEATER (AND THE MOVIES)

The theater has a long history as a public art. But, outside the provinces of socialist realism, there are few plays today dealing with social-and-topical problems. The best modern plays are those devoted to raking up private, rather than public, hells. The public voice in the theater today is crude and raucous, and, all too often, weakminded.

The most notable example of weakmindedness around at the moment is Arthur Miller's new play, *After the Fall,* which opened the first season of the Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre. Miller's play stands or falls on the authenticity of its moral seriousness, and on its being about "big" issues. But, unfortunately, Miller chose as the method of his play the garrulous monologue of the psychoanalytic confessional, and flatteringly designated the audience as the Great Listener. "The action of the play takes place in the mind and memory of Quentin, a contemporary man" this poor Quentin is! Contemporary man (as Miller and the timeless, placeless interior setting give the show away: whatever stirring public issues *After the Fall* may confront, they are treated as the furniture of a mind. That places an awful burden on Miller's "Quentin, a contemporary man," who must literally hold the world in his head. To pull that one off, it has to be a very good head, a very interesting and intelligent one. And the head of Miller's hero isn't any of these things. His character is not much of a source of pleasure, either. In fact, what a passive, mealy-minded, self-pitying creep of a "contemporary man" this poor Quentin is! Contemporary man (as Miller represents him) seems stuck in an ungainly project of self-exoneration. Self-exoneration, of course, implies self-exposure; and there is a lot of that in *After the Fall.* Many people are willing to give Miller a good deal of credit for the daring of his self-exposure—as husband, lover, political man, and artist. I am not, since I learned nothing from it. In this play, Miller's self-exposure is mere self-indulgence.

After the Fall does not present an action, but ideas about action. Its psychological ideas owe more to Franzblau than Freud. (Quentin's mother wanted him to have beautiful penmanship to take revenge through her son upon her successful but virtually illiterate business-

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man husband.) As for its political ideas, where politics has not yet been softened up by psychiatric charity, Miller still writes on the level of a left-wing newspaper cartoon. (To pass muster at all, Quentin's young German girlfriend—this in the mid-1950's!—has to turn out to have been a courier for the 20th of July officers' plot; "they were all hanged." Quentin's political bravery is demonstrated by his triumphantly interrupting the harangue of the chairman of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee to ask, "How many Negroes do you allow to vote in your patriotic district?" This intellectual weak-mindedness of *After the Fall* leads, as it always does, to moral dishonesty. *After the Fall* claims to be nothing less than modern man taking inventory of his humanity—asking where he is guilty, where innocent, where responsible. What I find objectionable is not the peculiar conjunction of issues, apparently the exemplary issues of the mid-twentieth century (Communism, Marilyn Monroe, the Nazi extermination camps) which Quentin, this writer *manqué* pretending throughout the play to be a lawyer, has recapitulated in his own person. I object to the fact that in *After the Fall* all these issues are on the same level—not unexpectedly, since they are all in the mind of Quentin. The shapely corpse of Maggie-Marilyn Monroe sprawls on the stage throughout long stretches of the play in which she has no part. In the same spirit a raggedy oblong made of plaster and barbed wire—it represents the concentration camps, I hasten to explain—remains suspended high at the back of the stage, occasionally lit by a spot when Quentin's monologue swings back to Nazis, etc. *After the Fall*'s quasi-psychiatric approach to guilt and responsibility elevates personal tragedies, and demeans public ones—to the same dead level. Somehow—staggering impertinence!—it all seems pretty much the same: whether Quentin is responsible for the deterioration and suicide of Maggie, and whether he (modern man) is responsible for the unimaginable atrocities of the concentration camps.

Putting the story inside Quentin's head has, in effect, allowed Miller to short-circuit any serious exploration of his material, though he obviously thought this device would "deepen" his story. Real events become the ornaments and intermittent fevers of consciousness. The play is peculiarly loose-jointed, repetitive, indirect. The "scenes" go on and off—jumping back and forth from Quentin's first marriage, his second marriage (to Maggie-Marilyn), his indecisive courtship of his German wife-to-be, his childhood, the quarrels of his hysterical oppressive parents, his agonizing decision to defend an ex-Communist law school teacher and friend against a friend who has "named names." All "scenes" are fragments, pushed out of Quentin's mind when

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they become too painful. Only deaths, inevitably offstage, seem to move Quentin's life along: the Jews (the word Jews is never mentioned) died long ago; his mother dies; Maggie kills herself with an overdose of barbiturates; the law professor throws himself under a subway train. Throughout the play, Quentin seems much more a sufferer than an active agent in his own life—yet this is precisely what Miller never acknowledges, never lets Quentin see as his problem. Instead, he continually exonerates Quentin (and, by implication, the audience) in the most conventional way. For all troubling decisions, and all excruciating memories, Miller issues Quentin the same moral solvent, the same consolation. I (we) am (are) *both* guilty and innocent, both responsible and not responsible. Maggie was right when she denounced Quentin as cold and unforgiving; but Quentin was justified in giving up on the insatiable, deranged, self-destructive Maggie. The professor who refused to "name names" before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee was right; but the colleague who did testify cooperatively had a certain nobility, too. And (choicest of all) as Quentin realizes while touring Dachau with his Good German girlfriend, any one of us could have been a victim there; but we could as well have been one of the murderers, too.

The circumstances and production of the play are marked by certain perverse strokes of realism that underscore the bad faith, the have-it-both-ways temper of the play. That vast sloping stage painted slate gray and empty of props, the mind of contemporary man, is so pointedly bare that one can't help jumping when Quentin, sitting much of the time stage front on a slate gray box-like form and chain-smoking, suddenly deposits the ashes in some mysterious pocket ashtray in the abutment. One is jarred again at the sight of Barbara Loden made up like Marilyn Monroe, displaying the mannerisms of Monroe, and bearing an extraordinary physical resemblance to Monroe (though lacking the fullness of figure needed to complete the illusion). But perhaps the most appalling combination of reality and play lies in the fact that *After the Fall* is directed by Elia Kazan, well known to be the model for the colleague who named names before HUAC. As I recalled the story of the turbulent relations between Miller and Kazan I felt the same queasiness as when I first saw *Sunset Boulevard*, with its dizzying parody of and daring references to the real career and former relationships of Gloria Swanson, the old movie queen making a comeback, and Eric Von Stroheim, the forgotten great director. Whatever bravery *After the Fall* possesses is neither intellectual nor moral; it is the bravery of a species of personal perversity. But it's far inferior to *Sunset Boule-*

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vard: it does not acknowledge its morbidity, its qualities of personal exorcism. *After the Fall* insists, as it were, to the bitter end, on being serious, on dealing with big social and moral themes; and as such, it must be judged sadly wanting, in both intelligence and moral honesty.

Since it insists on being serious, I suspect that *After the Fall* will seem just as belabored, trite, and dated in a few years as O'Neill's *Marco Millions,* the second play in the Lincoln Center Repertory, does now. Both plays are disfigured by a distressing (though, one imagines, unconscious) complicity with what they profess to attack. The attack which *Marco Millions* launched upon the philistine values of American business civilization itself reeks of philistinism; *After the Fall* is a long sermon in favor of being tough with oneself, but the argument is soft as mush. It is indeed difficult to choose between the two plays, or their productions. I don't know which is more heavy-handed: Marco Polo's Babbittish exuberance over the wonders of Cathay ("Sure is a nice little palace you got here, Khan"—Americans are crude and materialistic, see?); or the weird declamations, at times archly poetic and stilted, at times WEVD soap opera, of Miller's hero Quentin (Americans are tormented and complex, see?). I don't know which I found more monotonous, less ingratiating as an acting performance—Jason Robard Jr.'s depleted gauche Quentin or Hal Holbrook's hysterically boyish Marco Polo. I could hardly tell Zohra Lampert when she was the Bronxy chick who keeps running into Quentin's head to slobber all over him for giving her the courage to have a nose job from Zohra Lampert when she was supposed to be that elegant lovelorn flower of the Orient, Princess Kukachin in *Marco Millions.* True, Elia Kazan's staging of *After the Fall* was stark and *moderne* and repetitive, while José Quintero's staging of *Marco Millions* was tricky and pretty and had the advantage of Beni Montresor's lovely costumes, though the stage was so badly lit you couldn't be sure of what you saw. But the differences in the productions seemed trivial, when you consider that Kazan had toiled over a bad play, and Quintero over a play so juvenile that no production, however good, could redeem it. The Lincoln Center Repertory group (our National Theatre?) is a stunning disappointment. It's hard to believe that all its vaunted freedom from Broadway commercialism has begotten are passably acted productions of this wretched play by Miller, a play by O'Neill so bad it isn't even of historical interest, and a fatuous comedy by S. N. Behrman that makes *After the Fall* and *Marco Millions* look like works of genius. And this, while a beautiful and serious new American play, Robert Lowell's *The Old Glory,* has thus far gone without the large and important production it deserves.

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If Arthur Miller's play fails as a serious play because of its intellectual softness, Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* fails because of its intellectual simplicity and artistic naiveté. But this is failure of another order. *The Deputy* has been put into awkward English, and even in German it can't be much as a play. Hochhuth couldn't care less about the truth of Aristotle's observation that poetry is more philosophical than historical; Hochhuth's characters are little more than mouthpieces for the exposition of historical facts, for the collision of moral principles. But after the way in which Miller turns all events into their subjective reverberations, the artistic weakness of *The Deputy* seems almost condonable. *The Deputy* has all the directness toward its subject that Arthur Miller's play lacks. Its virtue is precisely that it refuses to be subtle about the murder of the six million Jews.

But the production by Herman Shumlin is as far from Hochhuth's play (as written) as that play (as written) is from being a great play. Hochhuth's crude but powerful six to eight hour documentary in play form has been put through Shumlin's Broadway Blendor and emerges as a two hour and fifteen minute comic strip, and a dull one to boot—the story of a handsome well-born hero, a couple of villains, and a few fence-sitters, titled The Story of Father Fontana, or Will the Pope Speak?

I'm not of course suggesting that the whole six to eight hours must be played. The play as written *is* repetitive. But a theatre public that is willing to sit through four or five hours of O'Neill could surely be persuaded to sit through—say—four hours of Hochhuth's play. The important thing is to get a four hour version that would do justice to the narrative. In the present Broadway version, you would never guess that the noble SS Lieutenant Kurt Gerstein (a true person) is as important a character and as much the hero of *The Deputy* as the Jesuit Father Fontana (a composite figure based on Provost Lichtenberg and Father Kolbe.) Neither Eichmann, nor the notorious Professor Hirt, nor the Krupp industrialist—all important characters in Hochhuth's play as he wrote it—appear at all in the Broadway version. (Among the dropped scenes, one particularly misses Act I, Scene 2, the party given by Eichmann.) By concentrating exclusively on the story of Fontana's vain appeals to the Pope, Shumlin has gone far toward burying the historical memories which Hochhuth's play aims to keep alive. But this drastic simplification of Hochhuth's historical argument is not even the worst offense of Shumlin's version. The worst offense is the refusal to dramatize anything really painful to watch. Certain scenes in *The Deputy* are excruciating to read. None of this—

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the terror and torture, the gruesome boasts and banter, even the recitals of unimaginable statistics—has been left in. The entire horror of the murder of the six million has been reduced to one scene of police interrogation of some Jewish converts to Catholicism, plus a single image repeated three times in the course of the play: a line of bent, ragged figures shuffles across the dark rear of the stage; midstage stands an SS man, his back to the audience, yelling something that sounds like "Move along now!" A conventional image; an entirely palatable image; an image which neither stirs, nor disgusts, nor terrifies. Even Fontana's long monologue, the speechifying scene on the freightcar headed for Auschwitz—the seventh of the eight scenes in Shumlin's emasculated version—was cut just before opening night. Now the play moves directly from the confrontation between the Pope and Father Fontana at the Vatican to the final scene in Auschwitz, of which all that's left is the amateurish philosophical debate between the demonic SS doctor and Fontana, who has donned the yellow star and elected martyrdom in the gas chambers. The reunion of Gerstein and Fontana, their appalling discovery that Jacobson has been captured, the torture of Carlotta, the death of Fontana—all are omitted.

Although the decisive damage is already done by the version which Shumlin has carved from the play, it should be noted that the production is in most ways inadequate as well. Rouben Ter-Arutunian's slim allusive sets belong to another director; they are lost on a production utterly lacking in the slightest subtlety or stylization. The actors are no more but no less inept and unskillful than the average Broadway cast. As usual, there is the same overstatement of emotions, the same monotony of movement, the same mélange of accents, the same flatness of style that makes for the low level of American acting. The leads, who are English, seem more gifted—though their performances are thin. Emlyn Williams plays Pope Pius XII with a hesitant stiffness of movement and speech, presumably designed to indicate Papal solemnity, which aroused my suspicion that he was indeed the late Pope, exhumed for the occasion, and in an understandably fragile condition. At the least, he looked suspiciously like the life-size statue of Pius XII behind glass near the entrance of Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Jeremy Brett, who plays Father Fontana, has an agreeable presence and lovely diction, though he floundered badly when he had to convey real despair or terror.

These recent plays—and some others, like *Dylan,* which it would be a mercy to pass over in silence—illustrate once again that the American theater is ruled by an extraordinary, irrepressible zest for

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intellectual simplification. Every idea is reducible to a cliché, and the function of a cliché is to castrate an idea. Now, intellectual simplification has its uses, its value. It is, for example, absolutely indispensable to comedy. But it is inimical to the serious. At present, the seriousness of the American theater is worse than frivolity.

The hope for intelligence in the theater is not through conventional "seriousness," whether in the form of analysis (bad example: *After the Fall*), or the documentary (weak example: *The Deputy*). It is rather, I think, through comedy. The figure in the modern theater who best understood this was Brecht. But comedy, too, has its enormous perils. The danger here is not so much intellectual simplification as failure of tone and taste. It may be that not all subjects can be given a comic treatment.

This question of the adequacy of tone and taste to serious subject matter is, of course, not confined to the theater alone. There is an excellent illustration of the advantages of comedy, and of its peculiar dilemmas—if I may jump to the movies for a moment—in two films recently showing in New York, Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* and Stanley Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb*. The virtues and failures of both films seem to me oddly comparable, and instructive.

In the case of *The Great Dictator,* the problem is easily discernible. The entire conception of the comedy is totally, painfully, insultingly inadequate to the reality it purports to represent. The Jews are Jews, and they live in what Chaplin names a Ghetto. But their oppressors don't display the swastika but the emblem of the double cross; and the dictator is not Adolph Hitler but a balletic buffoon with a mustache named Adenoid Hynkel. Oppression in *The Great Dictator* is uniformed bullies throwing so many tomatoes at Paulette Goddard that she has to wash her laundry all over again. It is impossible to see *The Great Dictator* in 1964 without thinking of the hideous reality behind the movie and one is depressed by the shallowness of Chaplin's political vision. One cringes at that embarrassing final speech, when the Little Jewish Barber steps up to the podium in place of Der Phooey to call for "progress," "liberty," "brotherhood," "one world," even "science." And to watch Paulette Goddard looking up to the dawn and smiling through her tears—in 1940!

The problem of *Dr. Strangelove* is more complex, though it may well be that in twenty years it will seem as simple as *The Great Dictator.* If the positive assertions at the close of *The Great Dictator* seem facile

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and insulting to its subject, so may the display of negative thinking of *Doctor Strangelove* soon (if it does not already) seem equally facile. But this does not explain its appeal now. Liberal intellectuals who saw *Doctor Strangelove* during its many preview showings last October and November marvelled at its political daring, and feared that the film would run into terrible difficulties (mobs of American Legion types storming the theaters, etc.). As it turned out, everybody, from the *New Yorker* to the *Daily News,* has had kind words for *Doctor Strangelove;* there are no pickets; and the film is breaking records at the box-office. Intellectuals and adolescents both love it. But the 16-year-olds who are lining up to see it understand the film, and its real virtues, better than the intellectuals, who vastly overpraise it. For *Doctor Strangelove* is not, in fact, a political film at all. It uses the OK targets of left-liberals (the defense establishment, Texas, chewing gum, mechanization, American vulgarity) and treats them from an entirely post-political, *Mad Magazine* point of view. *Doctor Strangelove* is really a very cheerful film. Certainly, its fullbloodedness contrasts favorably with what is (in retrospect) the effeteness of Chaplin's film. The end of *Doctor Strangelove,* with its matter-of-fact image of apocalypse and flip soundtrack ("Till We Meet Again") reassures in a curious way, for nihilism is *our* contemporary form of moral uplift. As *The Great Dictator* was Popular Front optimism for the masses, so *Doctor Strangelove* is nihilism for the masses, a philistine nihilism.

What is good in *The Great Dictator* are the solitary autistic acts of grace, like Hynkel playing with the balloon-globe; and the "little man" humor, as in the sequence where the Jews draw lots for a suicidal mission out of slices of a pie, and Chaplin ends up with all the tokens in his slice. These are the perennial elements of comedy, as developed by Chaplin, over which has been pasted this unsatisfactory political cartoon. Similarly, what is good in *Doctor Strangelove* has to do with another perennial source of comedy, mental aberration. The best things in the film are the fantasies of contamination expounded by the psychotic Gen. Jack D. Ripper (played with excruciating brilliance by Sterling Hayden), the super-American clichés and body movements of Gen. Buck Turgidson, that wonderful American businessman-military type put together by George C. Scott, and the euphoric satanism of Doctor Strangelove himself, the Nazi scientist with the alienated right hand (Peter Sellers). The specialty of silent film comedy (and *The Great Dictator* is still, essentially, a silent film) is the purely visual crossing of grace, folly, and pathos. *Doctor Strangelove* works another classic vein of comedy, as much verbal as visual—the idea of humors. (Hence

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the joke names of characters in *Doctor Strangelove,* exactly as in Ben Jonson.) But notice that both films rely on the same device for distancing the audience's feelings: employing the same actor to play several key roles. Chaplin plays both the Little Jewish Barber and the dictator Hynkel. Sellers plays the relatively sane British officer, the weak American president, and the Nazi scientist; he was originally supposed to take a fourth role as well, that of the Texan, played in the film by Slim Pickens, who commands the plane which drops the H-Bomb that sets off the end of the world. Without this device of the same actor playing morally opposed roles, and so subliminally undermining the reality of the entire plot, the precarious ascendancy of comic detachment over the morally ugly or the terrifying in both films would be lost.

Doctor Strangelove fails most obviously in scale. Much (though not all) of its comedy seems to me repetitive, juvenile, ham-handed. And when comedy fails, seriousness begins to leak back in. One begins to ask serious questions about the misanthropy which is the only perspective from which the topic of mass annihilation is comic. . . . For me, the only successful spectacle shown this winter dealing with public issues was a work which was both a pure documentary *and* a comedy—Daniel Talbot and Emile de Antonio's editing into a ninety minute film of the TV kinescopes of the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings. Viewed in 1964, all the good guys come off badly—Army Secretary Stevens, Senator Symington, lawyer Welch, and the rest, looked like dopes, stuffed shirts, ninnies, prigs, or opportunists—while the film irresistibly encourages us to relish the villains aesthetically. Roy Cohen, with his swarthy face, slicked down hair, and double-breasted pin-stripe suit looked like a period punk from a Warner Brother's crime movie of the early thirties; McCarthy, unshaven, fidgety, giggling, looked and acted like W. C. Fields in his most alcoholic, vicious, and inaudible roles. In that it aestheticized a weighty public event, *Point of Order* was the real *comédie noire* of the season, as well as the best political drama.

A word about some plays whose merit lies in their exploration of private feelings, and their experiments with new forms for the stage.

John Carlino has called his *Telemachus Clay* a "collage for voices." Eleven actors (4 women, 7 men) seated in a row on high stools facing the audience played some ninety roles; and the acting was superior—though that may be partly because two-thirds of acting, body movement, was omitted. The staging, and the author's use of narration as well as acting-out, were the most interesting, and successful, things

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about the play. For *Telemachus Clay* tells an embarrassing story which eventually collapses under the weight of its pretentiousness. The plot line is almost effaced by verbal ornament; the beginning and end, strongly reminiscent of *Under Milk Wood* with a touch of *Our Town,* were particularly cloying. Some of the central scenes in Hollywood seemed unhappily adapted from bad movies about Hollywood. The intrusive and useless reference to myth (Telemachus seeking his father, etc.) is awful, as is Carlino's self-consciousness about modernism. (The program contained a silly glossary of hipster slang used by the characters.) Yet the play had some excellent moments—as in the party scene and the seduction of Tel by the scriptwriter's wife (touchingly played by Scottie MacGregor), and in the speech of the "prophet" (played by Clayton Corbin). Carlino has an accurate feeling for two emotions which are wonderfully dramatic—nastiness and euphoria. For all its faults, *Telemachus Clay* is a play with some life.

Adrienne Kennedy's short play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro,* strikingly directed by Michael Kahn, was presented in January. Miss Kennedy's play comes out of Genet's *The Blacks;* it is derivative, excessive, and full of mistakes (like the suicide of the heroine at the end). But the body of *Funnyhouse* works with a beautiful idea of hallucination—the deranged girl in colloquy with four incarnate ideas of herself: Queen Victoria, a Grand Duchess, the murdered Patrice Lumumba, and Jesus Christ. As a play about the Negro problem, it is dull and garish. As a play about cracking up, whose content happens to be painful fantasies about being black, it is sensitive and promising.

The best play by far in recent months lasts only eighteen minutes. It has three characters, named Woman 1, Woman 2, and Man, all of whom are dead, and confined up to their necks in adjacent urns. Not only is each immobilized but each character can speak only when a beam of light, which moves irregularly, strikes his or her face; there are 183 light cues in the eighteen minutes. In *Play,* Samuel Beckett has brought his dramatic art to a point of perfection. It is directed, beautifully, by Alan Schneider. The actors are Marian Reardon, Michael Lipton, and Frances Sternhagen; Robert D. Currie controls the lights. To fill out the evening, a sleek, heartless, amusing one-acter by Harold Pinter, *The Lover,* is on the same bill. But *Play* is the thing.

Susan Sontag

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Reuben A. Brower

SCRUTINY: REVOLUTION FROM WITHIN

The republication of *Scrutiny*[1] is a cultural event—a Scrutinizer might say—of some importance, a generous recognition of the fact that the journal and the movement behind it formed a revolutionary episode in the history of education and of literary criticism. For *Scrutiny* to be republished by the Cambridge University Press is a tribute both to Dr. Leavis and Mrs. Leavis and to that ancient University—a characteristically English gesture that would be hard to match in this country. Suppose that a brash young instructor in one of our older universities had started a journal in which he published to the world a plan of studies that was to serve as a model for his department and for humane education generally, a plan that would radically alter the habits of thinking of both teachers and students. Then let us envisage the same university thirty years later consecrating this effrontery by re-issuing the journal and advertising it as "worthy to rank with the great reviews of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." We may well wonder whether an American university press would be capable of a similar gesture, at once so generous and so cannily respectable.

For *Scrutiny* represented the least forgivable of revolutions, a revolution from within the academy:

> *All shuffle there; all cough in ink;*
> *All wear the carpet with their shoes;*
> *All think what other people think. . .*

Hence the cries of pain with which the publication was greeted in university circles, both English and American. But though *Scrutiny* proved to be Cambridge's severest critic, it was very much an expression of the Cambridge mind, and a local outgrowth of a literary revolution that had been going on in England for some twenty or more years.

1. *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review.* Reissued in 20 volumes 1932-1953. New York: Cambridge University Press: $125 the set; $6.50 per volume.

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Perhaps I can bring home to American readers what the arrival of *Scrutiny* meant by indulging in a personal reminiscence or two, since I had the good luck to have been on the scene and to have overheard some of the talk when *Scrutiny* was being invented. For a graduate fresh from a fresh-water college and the teaching of the New Humanists, where, as Santayana said, the "cry" was

> Let us be well-balanced, let us be cultivated, let us be high-minded; let us control ourselves, as if we were wild; let us chasten ourselves, as if we had passions. . .
> (Quoted by Q. D. Leavis, IV[2])

—for anyone bred in such simplicities, it was a considerable shock to encounter the Cambridge and England of Richards, Eliot, Frazer, and G. E. Moore. To find as I did, that one's supervisor of studies was a young man with the eye of Blake and a sensitive and sharply outlined profile, his collar Byronically open at the throat (in the England of 1930!), with a voice of unforgettable timbre and incredibly persuasive power, to find an ally against the academic who was at once morally intense and sardonically irreverent! And what did the fresher do? He went to the nearest bookstore and bought at once: *The Principles of Literary Criticism, The Sacred Wood* and *Poems,* 1909-1925, *To the Lighthouse,* and *A Passage to India.* He had joined the revolution.

The revolution had of course begun elsewhere, with Pound, Eliot, Yeats and Hulme (among others). But by 1930, Cambridge had a going literary revolution of its own, related to what was happening in London, but deriving from local philosophic and critical habits of mind ("What do you *mean*?" had been the watchword at Cambridge long before *The Meaning of Meaning*). Richards had brought out *Practical Criticism* in 1929 and was now lecturing on modern poetry and "the philosophy of rhetoric." Basil Willey was giving the lectures that were to become *The Seventeenth Century Background.* A young poet-critic had just gone down after writing a book enigmatically entitled *Seven Types of Ambiguity,* and somewhere in a cave-like chamber Wittgenstein sat darkly meditating to the dedicated few.

But there was also another Cambridge, the literary and intellectual culture that may be described as "King's College-Bloomsbury." The *Two Memoirs* of J. M. Keynes sums up perfectly the attitudes and allegiances of the group that included the Woolfs, Lytton Strachey, and

2. Roman numerals throughout the article refer to volumes of *Scrutiny.* There is an excellent index.

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E. M. Forster. They claimed Moore as their philosophic guide, though Moore said he never "did know" what "The Method" was that they regarded as his. Their cult of the "moment" reached back to Pater and the fading Aesthetic movement of the nineties. For this Cambridge, Clive Bell (*Art*) was an aesthetician of some importance, and Strachey a major critic and an authority on French literature. (In the early thirties, Strachey's Home University *Landmarks* was regularly being recommended to Cambridge undergraduates.)

In addition to these more novel forms of literary life there was at Cambridge as at other universities what Q. D. Leavis has described as "the academic English club." In a brilliant and amusing essay, "The Discipline of Letters, a Sociological Note" (XII), Mrs. Leavis defines the distinguishing marks of the discipline as represented by the late George S. Gordon and the Oxford School of English: "On the one hand linguistic-philological studies as an end in themselves. On the other, scholarship—the ideal of perfect editing. . . ." "We see Gordon," Mrs. Leavis observes, "through his letters, filling all the university posts he can, at home and abroad, with men who have proved their right to 'a senior post' by editing something, and with every conviction of righteousness spreading despair and blight on university students throughout the British Commonwealth." It is fair to add that this type flourished more abundantly in Oxford than in Cambridge—which is one more reason why *Scrutiny* came into being where it did.

Upon this academic world at once revolutionary and inert, Leavis impinged. He in fact continued and completed the local revolution, carrying it sharply into the world of education, where Richards had already made his force felt with the disturbing revelations in *Practical Criticism* of how students of literature actually did read. The way that Leavis and *Scrutiny* were to take is indicated by his pamphlet of 1930, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* and by Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public,* of the same year. Both titles make clear what was to become clearer in time, that Arnold was the impelling example for Leavis even more than Eliot or Richards. Behind Arnold stands Dr. Johnson: *Scrutiny* belongs to the eighteenth-century tradition of the personal periodical. As in the *Idler* and the *Rambler,* the discipline of letters embraces the discipline of the soul and of society. When Eliot mistakenly diagnosed Arnold as "rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic," he was indicating what is for Leavis the central business of criticism: the preparation of a community of mind in which the "best that is known and thought" can freely circulate and prepare

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sensibility and intelligence for the creation and evaluation of works of literature.

The *Scrutiny* movement was above all educational in aim and in action, the effecting of a critical revolution through a revolution in literary education. The journal itself is a record, and an impressive one, of the kind of engagement with literature that has characterized Leavis's own teaching and that of his pupils from Manchester to Malaya. It is not possible to assume the proper stance in reading *Scrutiny,* to "go at it" in the right way without keeping in mind this concern with education in the broad Arnoldian sense. Readers who go to these volumes only in order to collect opinions and judgments (there are plenty of them!) are liable to be either too easily converted or too easily infuriated. We do not read *Scrutiny* to reach conclusions, but to share the excitement of the journey, to take part in an athletic encounter from which we emerge with a heightened awareness of what it is to read, and what it is to exercise literary and moral discrimination. We shall not travel far in these remarkable volumes without feeling how often the exploration of literature in other journals is confined by academic and social convenience, to what a degree the politics of literary or professional life enervate and inhibit both insight and evaluation.

The main emphasis of *Scrutiny*'s educational program cannot be separated from its critical program: the insistence on the exercise of literary sensibility as at once literary in the strict sense (referring to the use of words "here" and "here") and as moral in the most personal and the largest social meanings of that term. The choice between poems is a choice between lives, and a choice between lives implies a choice between societies. But no choice whatever is possible without the finest individual response to the expression of the poet, the novelist, the dramatist. What surprised readers early and late was that Leavis and his colleagues insisted on adding to this conventional list of creative writers the historian, the philosopher, the sociologist, the anthropologist, in short all writers who are engaged in the business of evaluating and shaping the world in which we live. With close reading of texts American teachers and critics are sufficiently familiar, but the typical explications "produced" (too often the right word) in this country are not to be confused with the characteristic explorations of Leavis and his colleagues. It is ironic that the academic reaction against writers for *Scrutiny* has often tended to take them for fellow-travelers of the New Critics. The difference is a radical one: the typical *Scrutiny* critic is always persuading us—at times too urgently—to reach the *right* reading,

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and the *right* evaluation of what we have read. The nearest parallel among American critics is Yvor Winters.

The larger social import of the critic's role is most apparent in the "Sketch for an English School" (IX) that Leavis offered to his surely surprised colleagues in the Cambridge English Faculty. It is regrettable, and also a measure of the effective inertia of the academy, that this interesting plan and the related discussions of it in *Scrutiny* have been largely forgotten. One benefit of the present republication is that the planners of this generation may be reminded of the lesson largely wasted on the last.

Leavis's thinking about literary education led him to re-define the "Idea of a University" in a series of articles later incorporated in *Education and the University,* a volume that had the honor of being quoted by President Pusey of Harvard in his second annual report. American readers may also be interested to note that the occasion for the first of the articles was the publication of Alexander Meiklejohn's *The Experimental College* (1932), and of Brooks Otis's "Thoughts After Flexner" (1934), which appeared in a short-lived American journal, *The New Frontier.* The basic "Idea" is stated in not unfamiliar terms:

> An urgently necessary work, consequently, is to explore the means of bringing the various essential kinds of specialist knowledge and training into effective relation with informed general intelligence, humane culture, social conscience and political will. Indicated here we have the function that is pre-eminently the university's; if the work is not done there it will not be done anywhere. (III)

The contrast with the humanism of Babbitt and of the authors of various General Education and Great Books schemes is clear from an earlier reference to Meiklejohn in the same volume:

> The true tribute to Dr. Meiklejohn and his colleagues would be to suggest how the spirit, and, to a great extent, the technique, of the Experimental College might be applied in a real training of intelligence, a real education, which should start from, and be always associated with, the training of sensibility in the literature of the student's own language (where alone it is possible).

It is the point made in the last half of the sentence that American "general educators" have often neglected. Consider for example the emphasis at Chicago on Great Ideas embalmed in the hoariest of translations and finally extracted in the *Syntopicon.*

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It is this central and strenuous "discipline of letters" that sets the "Sketch for an English School" apart from apparently similar programs in American Civilization and in History and Literature. The "Sketch" resembles such plans only in the focus on a period—the seventeenth century—and in the attempt to bring many kinds of knowledge into play, from cultural history and sociology to philosophy and the history of science. But the student is not to pursue literary criticism of texts with his left hand, while manipulating historical generalizations with his right. He is enjoined to see that precision and fullness of response to language are in constant demand and indispensable to finesse in generalization, whether the text in question is a poem or a public document. The difference in moral intention already noted in contrasting *Scrutiny* close reading with explication of the New Critical variety is again paramount. The student is not invited to study a period placed "off there," as so often in the usual American counterpart; he is asked rather to engage actively in studying a phase of English civilization linked in living continuity with the present. Where there are notable breaks and contrasts with the twentieth century, he is enjoined to evaluate the gains and losses. Because of the constant emphasis on

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critical reading and writing, there is no question in this plan for General Education of directly teaching values or of handing over an approved philosophy. The aim is to keep putting the student in situations where he can and must make his own discriminations.

Here we must add "his own" with a difference: for Leavis is thinking of English undergraduates in an ancient English university, immersed in a traditional civilized way of life. In the "Sketch for an English School," the adjective has a peculiar stress. No American university could take the plan over directly, nor could American teachers or students quite belong in it. In drawing up his program both for education and for criticism Leavis saw with admirable clarity that he must think locally and particularly to think and act effectively. Yet it can be said without paradox that *Scrutiny*—in part because it kept a window open on the American intellectual scene—pointed to the possibility of a Jamesian ideal cultural community that if the term were not soiled we might call "Atlantic." *Scrutiny* has in fact anticipated in attitude that has now become fashionable in English literary periodicals. From the early numbers of the journal, where the editors referred a little too enthusiastically to the *New Republic* and the *Hound and Horn* as exemplary publications, *Scrutiny* gave attention, at times over-generous and at times condescending, to American writers and American literary and social critics: among others, to Dos Passos, James, Hawthorne, Twain and Santayana, Edmund Wilson and Veblen, and the Lynds of *Middletown*. In view of the fairly common notion among American academics that *Scrutiny* criticism is anti-historical, it is amusing to recall that an early English critic of Leavis's plan for an English school chided him for giving too much emphasis to history. Those who are alarmed about two or more cultures might note the inclusion of the history of science in the plan and the pieces on scientific thought scattered through various issues of *Scrutiny*.

Leavis can say with some justification in his "Retrospect" that writers for the journal demonstrated at an early date the importance of sociological studies for literary criticism. In that remote era when critical journals were expected to have a political line, *Scrutiny* was often attacked even by friendly readers (including Santayana) for failing to make its position clear. In various pronouncements, beginning with "Under Which King, Bezonian?," the editors maintained "in face of the Marxist attitude, that to recognize the influence of the economic process and of material conditions generally upon culture should be to recognize also a need to assert a certain autonomy of the human spirit . . ." (III). Readers who can recall pro-Marxist or typically

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"socially-conscious" criticism of the thirties, or who turn to contemporary quotations in *Scrutiny* from Granville Hicks, Edmund Wilson, or (at the other extreme) T. S. Eliot, will agree that *Scrutiny's* humanism in politics has weathered the years remarkably well. But there is also, especially among minor contributors to *Scrutiny,* a current of nostalgia present also in Eliot, for an organic culture vaguely located in a medieval-village world, or more precisely in Elizabethan or Jacobean England. One writer on folk songs fondly places it in Appalachia! But the belief in a possible society where more of the potentialities of the individual might be realized and where the gap is less complete between the vision of the good life held by the intellectual and that held by the worker even if not realized at any point in history, remains a necessary one. The value of the standard when applied with an awareness of the complexities of actual situations past or present, can be seen in various *Scrutiny* essays, notably in the admirable review by L. C. Knights of Louis Wright's *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (III).

II

A critical evaluation of society as of education is thus implied everywhere in the more strictly literary contributions to *Scrutiny* from the earliest to the latest issues. Though a surprisingly wide range of subjects is represented in the critiques and reviews, including history, anthropology, economics, philosophy, music and art, I shall speak only of articles in literary criticism, limiting myself to the few areas in which I can speak with moderate confidence. What shall we say of the performance, if we take a broad look at the work of Leavis and Mrs. Leavis, of Knights, Traversi, Turnell, Harding—the writers who have established themselves, as Arnold would say, both by the "historical" and the "real" estimates? The historical measure should be kept well in mind, for we can hardly estimate the importance of these critics if we cannot recall actually or imaginatively the impact of their criticism in the period between the wars. In the thirties and forties Richardsian-Empsonian attention to the workings of language—call it "ambiguity" or "interinanimation"—still retained a dewy freshness, and to be concerned about society was so very "concerning." For those of us who had escaped from the impressionists and the philologists, to read Empson on Marvell, or Knights on Jonson or Mrs. Leavis on lady novelists, or Leavis on Yeats, Hopkins, and Forster was to breathe the breath of life. "Life" is the significant word, for we had discovered critics who

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carried us through "disciplined relevance of response" beyond the words to a sense of "what the living thing feels like. . . ."

The most remarkable thing for many of us was to find works of earlier writers treated with this immediacy of concern and works by contemporaries explored with an equally vivid sense of their relation to a living past. Eliot had led the way, but by the mid-thirties his criticism began to seem too remote in tone, too diplomatic in strategy for a generation insistently faced with the choice of life in so many areas outside literature. We were asking, with Dr. Johnson, that literature teach us in some way how to live life or endure it. Hence the excitement with which we read those earlier volumes of *Scrutiny*. Consider for example volume II (1933-34), and in particular some of the surprises and satisfactions it offered. Re-imagine the surprise of encountering in 1933 an essay on Pope that placed him in the line of Metaphysical Wit. (Remember that the Metaphysicals as we read them were contemporaries.) More important was to witness the skill and energy with which Leavis rescued Pope both from Victorian distaste and over-easy Sitwellian embrace of "the perfect craftsman" and "the wasp of Twit'nam." For the reader of English poetry to hear a critic write with conviction of Pope's moral allegiances was a major recovery. The analysis in this same volume of Swift's irony brought fresh recognition of the negation, the panic and emptiness, that more comforting interpretations had shielded us from. It was equally salutary to see as early as 1933 Joyce's "liberties with English" in "Work in Progress" definitely placed by contrast with Shakespeare's. Although the review in which Leavis makes the comparison is weakened by some longing for a "national culture rooted in the soil," the point that is made and well made is that Shakespeare's success depended in part on a cultural *order* now lost. In the same volume Leavis reviews Yeats's *Winding Stair* both fairly and generously, and with a happy lack of the solemnity and ingenious pedantry now in vogue. MacLeish's *Conquistador*—it was an event in 1932—is neatly related to Pound and—another surprise—warmly recommended. Faulkner's *Light in August* is handled with a similar temperance and related to "that great book, *Huckleberry Finn*." There are other novelties in pieces by other hands: Miss Bradbrook on the "caricature" and "Chaucerian" element in *Hero and Leander;* John Speirs reminding us that Dunbar is "modern" by being "medieval," that Burns acquires a new critical interest when related to the Scottish vernacular tradition; and Mrs. Leavis in the first of her pieces on the sociology of literature, demonstrating a shrewd and at that time less common awareness of the "differences that result from living in the world of letters and living

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below it in the world of journalism." (The period she referred to was 1890-1914.)

One impression that comes out strongly from re-reading *Scrutiny* is the excellence of Mrs. Leavis's contributions, the originality and incisiveness of her approach, the verve of her brilliantly ironic style, and her power of discovering new interest in fashionable and less fashionable writers. It has long been a pity that her essays on Jane Austen have not been available in book form, for whether or not we accept her reconstruction of the history of *Mansfield Park*, we must recognize that with D. W. Harding she gave a new strength and force to the criticism of Jane Austen. Another volume could well be collected from her reviews of fiction. In her evaluations of Edith Wharton and Henry James she expressed some necessary if unheeded reservations about going along with the rising Jamesimania. But perhaps her best work is to be seen in her admirable studies of nineteenth-century intellectuals. In the essays on Sidgwick, Haddon, and Stephen Mrs. Leavis does a remarkable job of analyzing and recovering another Cambridge "culture," one that also helped determine the character of the criticism published in *Scrutiny*. The two closely related pieces on Santayana, both of them amusing and sharp, define beautifully his value as a critic of literature and of English and American intellectual life, although in stressing Santayana's Latin character, Mrs. Leavis overlooks the influence of his proper Bostonian social milieu.

Leavis's major contributions to *Scrutiny*, the essays on poetic tradition, on the novel, and on Lawrence, are so well known in book form, and their effect on current critical opinion is so generally recognized as to need no comment here. Readers who know Leavis only in the later polemical phase should not miss the finely appreciative review of Hopkins's letters (IV), the well-nigh perfectly balanced estimate of Forster (VII), the shrewd essays on Auden (V, IX), the more than generous criticism of Eliot's later poetry (XI, XII). Nor should one miss the well argued answer to Wellek, "Literary Criticism and Philosophy," which defines so well the distance between Leavis's approach to the poem as expressive act and that of a critic who "assumes too easily that the poet's essential 'belief' is what can be most easily extracted as such from his works by a philsopher" (VI).

Leavis's masterly—if one-sided—interpretation of *Othello* appears in the same volume with Traversi's interpretation of *Coriolanus*, a critical "revival" of the play that demonstrates admirably the connection between "the personal 'tragedy' of Coriolanus" and "the wider social study." Though Leavis influenced both Traversi and Knights in their criticism

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of Shakespeare, their individual style and emphasis is obvious enough. Beginning with the essay on *Coriolanus* Traversi published in *Scrutiny* a series of interpretations that might be described as central for this generation; they come about as close as possible to our sense of how Shakespeare should be read. (They do not initiate whole new ways of reading as did Wilson Knight.) Traversi's attention to detail of language is directed with precision, and while he accepts the anti-Bradleyian revolution, he has a sound sense of dramatic movement and emergent character. Like Knights he is interested in assessing the moral quality of Shakespeare's vision, or his uncertainties of vision, as in a play like *Troilus and Cressida*. Both critics are at times too certain of what Shakespeare himself is thinking, and Knights in his essays on both *Troilus* and *Hamlet*, like Traversi in his *Approach to Shakespeare*, writes in the apparently inescapable shadow of Eliot's "Hamlet and His Problems." In Knights's earlier work, as in his work on Jonson, we are disagreeably conscious of his reliance on Tawney, of a tendency more common in minor Scrutinizers to make over-easy correlations between social conditions and the growth of literature. But at his best as in the essays on Shakespearean language and style and in the introduction

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to the Sonnets, Knights tactfully balances the claims of individual sensibility and of the cultural setting.

One of the strongest among the older group of *Scrutiny* critics is Martin Turnell, whose essays on French writers of the seventeenth century are among the best examples in *Scrutiny* of the gift for renewing literature from a past or comparatively alien culture. English speaking readers who have difficulty in appreciating or sizing up the greatness of Racine could hardly find a better start than in Turnell's brief note of 1938 (VI). Turnell, like other *Scrutiny* critics of earlier literature, has been criticized for defects in scholarship, most strenuously in a review in *Scrutiny* itself (XVI). (In this instance and in many others, the editors published in letters and reviews some of the most stringent criticisms of writers for the journal.) John Speirs's essays on medieval subjects have perhaps drawn most fire from specialists. Although a first-rate medievalist has assured me that Speirs is less than first-rate, I doubt whether it can be denied, as Leavis says, that Speirs has done good service in "taking medieval literature out of the hands of the specialists and professionals and laying it open to the cultivated reader as living literature" (XX). As testimony to the need for someone to perform this office, I may recall a year's study of Chaucer in which a single critical remark was offered on the last day of the course, and a course in middle-English dialects in which no hint was offered that *Gawain and the Green Knight* was of the greatest literary interest. It is almost certain that the increased enthusiasm of late for medieval and Anglo-Saxon studies is in great measure traceable to writers like Speirs and Pound, who have made the young certain that there *was* an earlier English literature to be excited about. It is to be hoped that the next generation of medievalists will be both better scholars and better literary critics.

If we turn to minor contributors to *Scrutiny*, especially in the later volumes, we are less troubled by defective scholarship than by the relative uniformity of tone, the recurrence of the same or similar stances, and the predictability of judgments. Examples can be found without much effort, though less easily than the too eager opposition would have us believe. Of the sometimes disheartening exchanges between Leavis and various correspondents, no complete outsider can say much. Anyone who has had a few glimpses of Leavis's early years at Cambridge will agree that here is a subject calling for the exercise of tragic insight, that defenses and explanations cannot now undo the damage done, or clear away the misunderstandings that have grown up on all sides. Let it be remembered in charity that *Scrutiny* was carried on under the

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most difficult circumstances: with no angelic or official support, with little advertising, without an office staff, and for a number of years under the most frustrating wartime conditions. That it existed, that it grew and continued to grow, is an achievement little short of heroic. A journal in the personal Johnsonian tradition has back of it a Johnsonian life.

It is time to say something about the achievement as a whole, as an expression of a mind and as a revolution in the teaching and criticism of literature. Viewed chronologically, the latest volumes will strike most readers as less alive than those of the thirties and early forties. There are fewer discoveries either by way of subjects or writers, although we must make an exception for Marius Bewley's illuminating studies of Hawthorne and James. Nor can we overlook Leavis on Lawrence or Knights on *Troilus* or Traversi on *Lear*. The best of *Scrutiny* continues to be very good indeed. The campaign for Lawrence, which began with the first issue, is a good example of the importance of *Scrutiny* as a force for the criticism of literature and society. The essays that were later included in Leavis's book often call too persuasively for assent, assent which I for one am usually ready to give, though with an uneasy feeling that more is affirmed than shown. But those who remember the criticism of Lawrence in the thirties will know that the case had to be put strongly to be heard at all. At one extreme there was Middleton Murry proclaiming *The Plumed Serpent* as Lawrence's greatest work; at the other, Eliot damning him as a "rotten" influence. Leavis brought attention back to where it should be directed, to the fiction. It is the quality of attention elicited by Leavis and the major *Scrutiny* critics that is worth insisting on again: an almost tactile and sinuous response to the working of language, the most searching inquiry into the literary experience, but with a mind pressing toward the evaluation of the kind of life implied for the individual and society, not forgetting that any estimate must be tempered by direct experience of the tradition of civilized life in England and in Europe.

To demand for any writer attention of this order is in itself an act of evaluation, and readers who have been unable to get past the "dislodgment" of Milton should consider what has happened. Milton has not been dislodged, nor has he been put back on the shelf with the great unread, or if read, to be enjoyed as "a temple of sound" or commended as a forerunner of the New Humanism (so Milton was saved for my generation). His poetry in its full dramatic and philosophic range has been attended to and revived—where revival is possible—for a new generation of readers.

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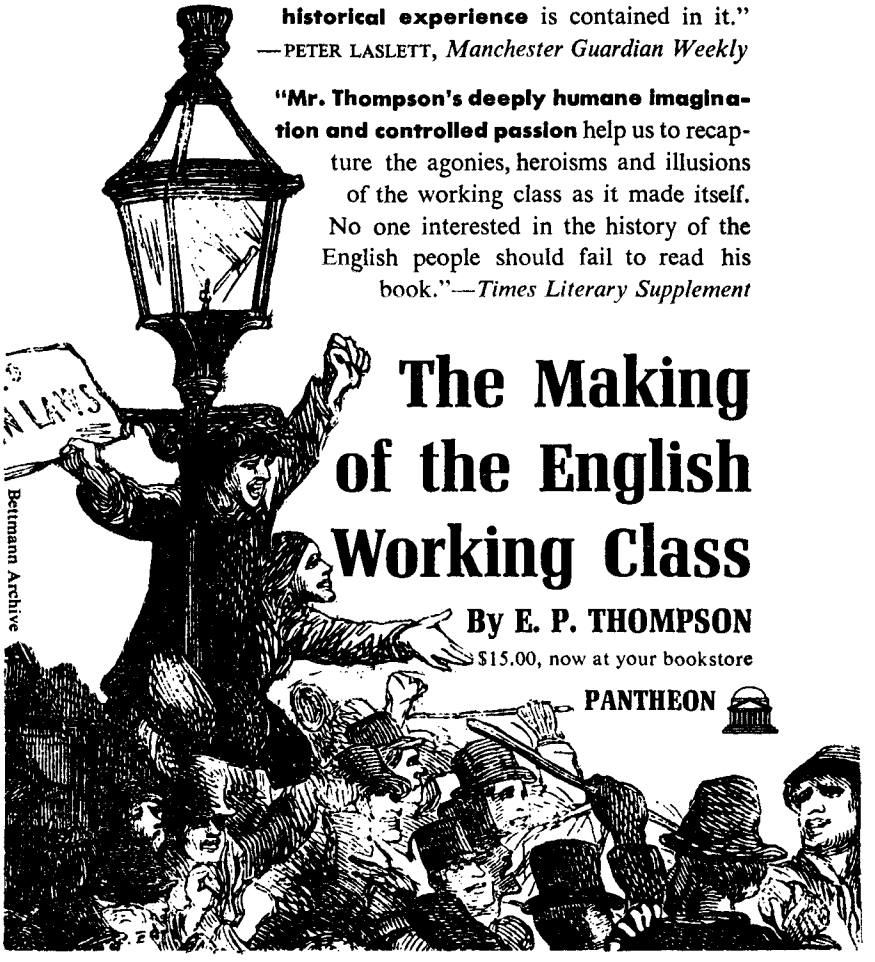

The Making of the English Working Class

By E. P. THOMPSON

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PANTHEON

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One could say something of the same sort for many writers that *Scrutiny* has helped, not to re-establish—many of them were too well "established" in popular or academic taste—but to bring back into the current of imaginative and moral life that flows through and beyond classrooms and literary coteries. We could cite among other examples: Pope and poets of the Augustan line through Crabbe, Wordsworth, Arnold and Leslie Stephen, Jane Austen, Dickens, and George Eliot, James and Hawthorne. It is true, as it was true of the criticism of Johnson and Arnold, that sometimes the moral judgment enters at too early a stage in the discussion. Numerous particular judgments will undoubtedly seem wrong or exaggerated to the most tolerant of readers. But it may also be said at the risk of committing a bull, that though the judgments offered in *Scrutiny* are on occasion wrong, they are relevantly wrong. "Relevantly," because they are deliberately and clearly directed to the great questions that must be attempted though they can never be finally answered. For a good example, consider Leavis's comments on Quentin Anderson's study of the influence on James of his father's symbolic system. In discussing Anderson's discovery, Leavis dismisses *The Ambassadors* as a "feeble piece of word-spinning," but in the course of making these and similarly trenchant criticisms, he points firmly to the kind of critical business neglected by Anderson: Anderson's discovery is interesting and may not be irrelevant, but "his use of his key seems to be something apart from his critical sensibility." The job of evaluating the later novels is left to one side and remains to be done. It can be clearly advanced only by essaying some kind of answer to the question of "What to do, how to live?" which the later novels pose so irritatingly for the responsible reader.

We return to *Scrutiny* then not to agree—I rarely read more than three or four pages without a rise of temperature—but to renew our vision of the full duty of the critic. The sense we recover, especially in returning to the volumes of the earlier decades, is of "reading for our lives." So we must, if we regard the critic's business as more than politely placing works in an agreeably disjunct past or a present aesthetically distanced from where we live. The importance of the republication of *Scrutiny* is not that it will forward certain social and moral doctrines or particular literary judgments, but that it may remind us of work to be done. No one will suggest, not Leavis himself, as he acknowledges in his "Retrospect," that *Scrutiny* should be revived. Whatever might be possible in England, it clearly would be impossible here. It always was. No American, even in the thirties, could speak with *Scrutiny's* assurance of "*the* tradition." It is our complex fate to be

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uncertain as to what tradition is surely ours if any, and to experience the terrifying and exhilarating process of living in a society trying to find its form, a process of which Lawrence was both a prophet and an initiating force. The value of Leavis's voice as of Lawrence's—it is Leavis's voice that we hear most clearly in this very personal journal—lies in reminding us of better societies that have been or are to be, and of their accessibility through literature fully and humanely experienced. The common pursuit to which he invites us is difficult, irritating, chancy, and if we cannot join him or go all the way, we may say in the words of a poem he condemns, " 'So get you gone . . . but with blessings on your head!' "

(*Editors' note*: *Mary McCarthy's essay on* Madame Bovary *will appear as the introduction to a new edition of the novel put out by The New American Library.*)

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